ELLERY QUEEN

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Mid-July 1983
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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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CLARK HOWARD (about a New Orleans getaway)

TIM HEALD (about Simon Bognor)

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a *NEW* Jeffery Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Hastings was missing. "I want to go after him," Rand said, "before it's too late."

"It's already too late," Parkinson told him. "We have to face the fact that he's gone for good. After ten days—"

"I want to go after him," Rand repeated. "I can't accept the fact that he's defected . . ."

THE SPY WHO STEPPED BACK IN TIME

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The news of Hastings' apparent defection hit Rand like a bombshell. It was brought to him in the rose garden of his small country home near Reading by Parkinson, the man who'd succeeded him seven years earlier as director of Concealed Communications.

"You can't be serious!" was Rand's first reaction. "Old Hastings would never defect! He's a rock of loyalty!"

Parkinson looked unhappy. "Even rocks can erode with the passage of time. I know he's been very close to you, Rand, and that's why they wanted me to bring you the news before it hits the papers."

"Close! Hastings taught me everything I ever knew about intelligence work. Since my retirement all the assignments I've undertaken have been at his urging."

But his outpouring was beginning to embarrass Parkinson, who'd come only to deliver a message. "We were all close to him, Rand. As close as you. I can't tell you how this news has disrupted the department."

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Rand tried to calm down. "Tell me what happened. Why do you think he's defected?"

"Well, a week ago Friday he withdrew certain classified documents from the files. He was authorized to see them, but not to remove them from the building. Apparently he violated regulations by taking them home for the weekend."

"That's been done before."

"No one saw him again, Rand. He disappeared with the documents and he hasn't been seen since."

"This was ten days ago?"

"Exactly. Last Monday we started calling around when he didn't come in to work. On Tuesday we discovered the missing documents and ordered a nationwide alert for him. We've been watching the airports and channel crossings ever since, but he hasn't turned up."

"What else?"

"Nothing else, Rand. That's it—not another bloody thing."

"What about his family?"

"His wife is dead, as you know. A brother in Scotland doesn't know a thing. He never had children."

"Had he behaved in an unusual manner before he disappeared?"

"Not at all. He was joking with me in the office on that last day."

Rand sighed and looked away across the little rose garden at a distant stand of trees. "How long before the press gets this?"

"Any day now, I imagine. Too many people know about it."

Rand took a deep breath. "I want to go after him, Parkinson, before it's too late."

"It's already too late, Rand. We have to face the fact that he's gone for good. After ten days—"

"I want to go after him," Rand repeated. "I can't accept the fact that he's defected."

"What other explanation is there?"

"Have the Russians said anything?"

"Not yet."

"If they had him, they'd let us know." Rand began to pace. "Just because there are a few documents missing—"

"There's one other thing. He emptied out his largest bank account the day he disappeared."

"So he was going somewhere. It doesn't have to be Moscow."

"You're clutching at straws, Rand. That's what we did, all last week."

"Are you driving back to London now?"

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"Yes."

"I'll go with you," Rand decided. "I want to see his office."

"We've been over every inch of it."

"I want to see it."

Rand went in the house and found his wife Leila in the kitchen. "Will Parkinson be staying for tea?" she asked.

"No. I'm going back to London with him." He told her what had happened.

"Not Hastings! I can't believe it!"

"Neither can I. Leila, I'm going after him."

"Where? You have no idea where he's gone."

"I only know that he'd come after me. He hasn't defected. He's in some sort of trouble."

She stared up into his eyes. "Be careful," she said, knowing nothing else that could be said.

The small book-lined office overlooking the Thames was much as Rand remembered it from his last visit some months back. In Rand's day it had been a place of unaccustomed peace—the eye of the hurricane. Now, without its central figure, it seemed more like a musty museum piece, a reconstruction of the great man's den. He stood and looked around it and asked Parkinson, "Is this the way he left it?"

"Exactly. Neat as a pin. As if he was leaving it for good."

Rand pulled open a file drawer, but Parkinson was quick to lay a hand across it. "I'm sorry. You no longer have authorization for that. I'm letting you in here only as a favor."

"Yes. Sometimes I forget I'm retired." Rand closed the drawer and let his eye wander to a calendar on the wall. It was one with a different scenic view for each month. *Scenes of Rural Britain.* "Was the calendar left like that?"

"I suppose it was. The room was searched but nothing was changed."

Rand stepped closer and studied the full-color photograph of a thatched-roof farmhouse nestled in a little valley. Beneath the photo was a brief caption: *Near Wimberley, Kent.* The month below the picture was July. "What's today's date, Parkinson?"

"Today? August sixteenth."

"And the day Hastings disappeared?"

"That would have been August sixth."

"Yet his calendar still says July."

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"I suppose with all the things poor Hastings had on his mind, he simply forgot to change it."

"For six days? You know Hastings as well as I do. He was a bug on changing calendars. It went with the neatness of his office. Some months he'd even change them a day early."

"I suppose that's so," Parkinson admitted.

"You're sure it was like this when you examined the office?"

"Pretty certain, yes. I seem to remember that photo of the farmhouse."

"And Hastings was in this office, at his desk, during the whole first week in August?"

"Yes."

Rand kept staring at the calendar. It was such a little thing, and yet it could have been meant as a message. "Do you still have an atlas around here someplace?" he asked Parkinson.

"In my office. I'll get it."

Rand followed him down the corridor to the doorway, glancing in at what once had been his office. Parkinson went in for brighter colors and flashier furniture. He reached into the bookcase behind his desk and produced a thick leather-bound atlas.

It took Rand only a moment to check the index. "That's odd. There's no Wimberley listed, in Kent or anywhere else."

"Sometimes I think they make up the names on those calendars," Parkinson said.

Rand went back to Hastings' office and looked at the other eleven pages. Each of the rural scenes was identified with the name of a familiar town or village: Dorking, Louth, Brackley, Crewe. All were in the atlas except for July. *Near Wimberley, Kent.*

"Perhaps it's a misprint," Parkinson suggested.

Rand turned over the calendar and jotted down the names of the photographer and printer. "Anything's possible," he admitted. "But if Hastings left it as some sort of message I intend to follow it up."

Parkinson shook his head. "Be reasonable, Rand. Who could Hastings possibly expect to spot a message like that?"

"Me," Rand replied.

The printer could tell him next to nothing. "I do calendars like that every August," he said, busily marking up some full-color press sheets as he talked. "We're running next year's calendar this week, if you want to see it."

"Are the pictures all different?"

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"Sure. We use a different theme every year. Next time it's the islands of Britain. They're sold through stationery and book stores. We do an animal one every year too."

"I was wondering about this July photo. It says 'Near Wimberley, Kent,' but there is no Wimberley in Kent. Nor anywhere else."

"Is that so?" The printer, whose name was Baxter, went on with his work. "You're the first one who's mentioned it."

"Where did you get the captions from?"

"The photographer supplied them. A young fellow named Jacobs. His name's on the calendar."

"Tony Jacobs. I have a note of it. Where could I reach him?"

"He has a studio in Greenwich, I think. It seems to me like you're going to a lot of trouble over nothing, though."

"You're not curious that Wimberley's not in the atlas?"

"Look under N. Maybe the place is called Near Wimberley."

"That's an idea," Rand admitted. "Thanks for your help, Mr. Baxter."

He checked the atlas again, but there was no Near Wimberley, either. He decided to phone the photographer in Greenwich. The number was easy enough to find—only one Tony Jacobs, Photographer was listed in Greenwich. As he reached for the phone, he wondered if he had wandered up a blind alley while the truth of Hastings' disappearance lay in a far different direction. Close as they had been, he knew little of the man's personal life. Maybe Parkinson had been right. Maybe for some bizarre reason of his own Hastings had gone over to Moscow.

No.

Rand dismissed the thought and dialed the Greenwich number.

A woman's voice answered. Rand asked to speak with Tony Jacobs. She hesitated, then asked, "Are you one of his customers?"

"Not exactly, but I want to ask him about a picture he took for a calendar."

"I'm afraid we can't help you. This is Tony's sister. We had a great tragedy last week. Tony was killed during a robbery."

Rona Jacobs promised to wait at the house for Rand, and he reached Greenwich a half hour later. The house was on a quiet side street within sight of the observatory. There was a photographer's studio on the ground floor with living quarters above. Rand entered the studio and was met by a dark-haired young woman in black. Her eyes were red from crying. "You're Mr. Rand?" she asked.

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"Yes. I'm sorry to trouble you at a time like this."

"The funeral was just this morning. I came by to start sorting out his things."

"Did he have a wife or family?"

She smiled sadly. "My brother was not the marrying kind. Occasionally he lived with women, but there was no one lately. You asked about a photograph—"

Rand showed her the calendar. "I'm interested in the negative for one of these."

"The person who ransacked the studio and killed Tony seems to have taken only one thing—that negative."

Rand's interest grew. "You were close to your brother and his work?"

"I—" Her voice broke and she covered her eyes. Then she said, "Yes, we were close."

"Could you tell me some more about how he died?"

She wiped her eyes and looked up. "Are you from the police?"

"I'm with a government department, working on another matter. The death of your brother could be connected with it."

"I'll help anyone who can find Tony's killer. Apparently he surprised someone ransacking the studio last Friday night and was shot to death at close range with his own gun. I found him and called the police, but the killer had gotten away without leaving any clues. This used to be a fine neighborhood. I can't believe something like this could happen to Tony."

"How old was he?"

"Twenty-nine. He'd had the studio for two years, doing commercial photography and some fashion work."

"When did he take the calendar pictures?"

"Oh, over the past few years, I think. He and one of his girls used to go for drives through the countryside on weekends. He was very pleased when he sold that calendar."

He showed her the July photo. "Do you remember anything in particular about this picture?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Have you ever been to Wimberley, or did you ever hear your brother mention it?"

"No."

"Would you be surprised if I told you no such place exists?"

"Well, of course it *exists*—it's there in the photograph."

"There is no Wimberley in England."

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"Well, maybe he got the name wrong."

"That's the most likely explanation."

She peered more closely at the picture. "Look at that old car down by the farmhouse! I'll bet this is Father's picture!"

"What?"

"One of Tony's negatives was ruined at the last minute and he needed a substitution. Our father was a photographer and he took a great many rural shots like this. He's dead now, but Tony inherited all his negatives. I remember he told me he used one of Father's old negatives to fill out the calendar. The colors had faded on some of them, but this one was still good."

"And the caption would have been reproduced from your father's negative?"

"Of course—that's probably it! Wimberley probably existed then, but it doesn't any more!"

"What makes a rural village stop existing?" Rand wondered.

Rona Jacobs shrugged. "War?"

"I never heard of any English villages being wiped off the map during the war."

"Neither did I," she admitted. "But that automobile in the picture could be from the early 1940s."

As soon as Rand left the photo studio, he telephoned Parkinson at his office. "I think I'm on to something. The photographer who put together that calendar was murdered last Friday night."

"Interesting!"

"Parkinson, what were the documents that Hastings took with him?"

"Sorry, that's classified."

"Get them unclassified. I want to see them in the morning."

"Not a chance of that, I'm afraid. You no longer have top security clearance."

"I'll be in your office at nine tomorrow," Rand said and hung up.

Parkinson was pacing nervously when Rand arrived promptly at nine the following morning. Before Rand could open his mouth, the tall man said, "I'm sorry, Rand. I gave it a good try, but the answer is no. They can't risk it."

"Look here, Parkinson—do you want to help me get Hastings back?"

Parkinson turned away and stared out the window at the river

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before answering. "To tell you the truth, I'm not sure. If he's gone over to them, wouldn't it be better if he never came back?"

"What did he take with him?" Rand insisted.

Parkinson took a deep breath. "Classified documents, as I've said. I'll admit they were nothing of current sensitivity—mainly World War II reports on certain secret projects. As you know, most of that material has been declassified, but there are still a few secrets left."

"What would the Russians want with something that's forty years old?"

"I don't know. What would Hastings want with it? I think you're on the wrong track, Rand."

"Then why was that photographer killed?"

"A coincidence."

Rand hit the desk in exasperation. "You know better than that, Parkinson! There are damn few coincidences in this business."

The tall man stared at him for several seconds. Finally he stepped behind his desk and took a sheet of paper from a drawer. "I pulled a printout of the documents index covering the missing items. They're marked in red. I'm not showing it to you, but it's here on the desk. I'm going down the hall for a cup of coffee."

"Parkinson—"

"That's the best I can do!"

"Bring me some coffee too, will you?"

When he was alone, Rand did what was expected of him. He stepped around the desk and read the three items on the list that had been marked in red:

435-AW-2398 Evasion techniques in defense of London.

435-AW-3435 Relocation of populace in conjunction with 2398.

436-AW-0031 Lighting diagrams for Operation Cowbarn.

When Parkinson returned with the coffee, Rand asked, "What was Operation Cowbarn?"

"I haven't the foggiest notion. It was before my time."

"There must be a document on it."

"This index covers only medium-grade security. That must still be classified top secret."

Rand drank his coffee. "Thanks, Parkinson."

"Where are you going now?"

"For a drive in the country."

The country southeast of London had always held a special fas-

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cination for Rand. He could imagine how it might have looked to those early pilgrims bound for Canterbury, and there were places where it might not be much different today. He thought too how it might have looked in more recent times, seen from the cockpit of German bombers on night runs to London.

Hastings must have thought about that, too.

Hastings had looked at that calendar on his wall for the entire month of July, and finally he had gotten out the atlas, just as Rand had done, and found there was no Wimberley in Kent. But then what?

How had he made the connection with those still-secret wartime documents?

Rand had no real plan as he drove south into Kent. Perhaps he thought he might come upon the thatched-roof farmhouse of the photograph, even though he now knew the picture to be forty years old. Perhaps he thought he might even sight Hastings himself somewhere along some country road.

But all he found were the quiet fields of August, and little crossroads villages where time seemed to stand still. He stopped in one of them, at a shop that sold maps and gift items, and spoke to a woman behind the counter.

"Wimberley? I never heard of it. It's not around here."

"I think it was, at one time. I wonder if there are any elderly residents I might speak with."

She thought about it. "I suppose old Willy Scott might know, if anyone did. Take the road to the left just beyond here. It's the third cottage on your right."

Rand thanked her and followed the directions. Willy Scott was a bedridden old man cared for by his daughter. They seemed less than excited about having a visitor, but Rand was finally admitted to the bedroom to ask his question.

"Wimberley?" the old man repeated. "Why would you be askin' about that?"

"I'm doing research on the war years," Rand answered.

"Nothing ever came out about Wimberley. Nothing except a few hints, anyway."

"What happened to it?"

"The Germans bombed it."

"Exactly where was it located?"

"I can't *tell* you. But if you have a map I might be able to show you."

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Rand went out to his car and returned with a road map of southeast England. The old man stared at it in puzzlement until his daughter produced his reading glasses. Then he focused in on an area halfway between Canterbury and their present location. "About here, I think. Somewhere along this stretch." He turned to his daughter. "Don't we still have that old atlas of Mother's?"

"I think it's around someplace."

"Go see if you can find it. I'm sure Wimberley would be in it."

"Why would the Germans want to bomb a place like that?" Rand asked.

"Didn't! We tricked 'em into it. Clever stunt. Put up lots of little lights, made them think it was London."

"I see. I seem to remember reading something about it, now that you mention it."

"Sure. I think they pulled it off a couple of times before the Germans got wise to it."

"What happened to the people who lived there?"

"Government moved them. There were only a few dozen, I think. Wimberley was never very big." His daughter returned with a musty old atlas of prewar vintage. Scott flipped through it and found the page he wanted. "Here you go! Right where I said it would be!"

Rand marked the location on his own map, stood, and shook the man's hand. "Thanks. You've been a great help."

"Why do you want to go to Wimberley? Nothing's there any more."

"I'm looking for a friend of mine. I think he might have gone there a week or two ago."

"I told you, Mister—it hasn't existed for over forty years. After the Germans bombed it, nobody ever moved back."

"We'll see," Rand said. "Thanks again very much for your help."

The daughter stood in the doorway watching him drive away.

An hour later Rand was ready to admit the old man hadn't been far from right. There was nothing except open fields at the spot he'd designated on the map. No village, no ruins, no marker commemorating where Wimberley had once stood. The only hint of some past settlement was a weed-grown dirt road that branched off from the main highway and disappeared over a slight rise. Rand decided to take it because there was noplace else to go.

Presently he came upon a young man in jeans leading a horse. Rand got out of the car and waved to him. "Could you help me?"

"What's the matter? You lost?"

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"Not exactly. Do you live around here?"

"Got a little land down on the highway." He smiled and held out his hand. "Name's Philip Buyer."

"I'm Jeff Rand. Glad to meet you. I guess my map must be out of date. It shows a village called Wimberley around here."

"No village within miles. Just farmland."

"I was supposed to meet a friend here. A man named Hastings. An older chap, with grey hair and a grey mustache."

"I haven't seen him, but then I wouldn't be likely to."

Rand reached into the car and took out the calendar. "Actually we were supposed to meet at this farmhouse. You wouldn't happen to recognize it?"

"Well, the thatched roof is gone but it looks a bit like the Armstrong place. It's on this road, just over the next rise."

"Thanks," Rand said and got back in his car.

As soon as he topped the hill, he saw that Buyer had been correct. There was no mistaking the house, even though the thatch had been replaced by tiles. He parked in front of it and knocked on the door. There was no immediate response, but as he listened he heard the sound of someone chopping wood around the back. He walked to the rear of the house and found a muscular man with a beard wielding an ax. "Hello there!" Rand called out. "I seem to have lost my way."

The man leaned the ax against a pile of newly cut firewood. "Easy to do in these parts. On your way to Canterbury?"

"No, Wimberley."

"Wimberley? I can't say I ever heard of that."

"Are you Mr. Armstrong?"

"That's me. Seth Armstrong. How'd you know?"

"One of your neighbors, Philip Buyer, directed me here." Rand unrolled the calendar he'd been carrying under his arm. "This picture appears to have been taken here. This could be your house."

The bearded man peered at the photograph. "No thatched roof on my place. In fact, when I bought it after the war it didn't have no roof at all. They tell me it got burned off during a German air raid."

"Then this must be your place."

"The trees are different," the man said skeptically.

"This picture would be forty-odd years old. Young trees would have grown and old trees might have been cut down for firewood, like you're doing right now."

"Maybe so," the man conceded.

"See? The caption says it's near Wimberley."

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"Still never heard of it. When I came here in the late Forties, the house was pretty much a ruin, without a roof. And you could still see the bomb craters in the fields."

"Why would the Germans drop their bombs out here in the country?" Rand asked.

"Don't know. You'd have to ask them. Somebody told me once our government moved everyone out and tricked the Germans into it, but I don't know about that."

Rand's eyes strayed to a freshly turned plot of ground near the barn. "It looks like you've been digging recently."

"Had to bury a calf that died last week. Hate to lose 'em. I don't have that many animals."

"You farm the place alone?"

"Pretty much. Young Phil Buyer helps me out when I need it. He's got the place next door but he don't farm it. Raises a few horses, that's all."

"Must be a lonely life. I don't suppose you get many visitors up this road."

"Not many."

"I'm looking for a fellow who might have come here last week or the week before."

"Don't remember nobody."

Rand wished he had a photograph of Hastings. "An older man with grey hair and a mustache?"

"Nope."

Rand glanced again at what looked like a freshly dug grave. "Well, thanks anyway."

Back in his car, he decided to keep driving along the rutted dirt road. About a mile further on, he passed the remains of a chimney that stood among the weeds of an empty lot. A house had been there once and he wondered if it too had been destroyed the night the German planes came over.

Presently the dirt road hooked up again with a paved highway. Rand consulted the map and saw that he was back on route 28 bound for Canterbury. He'd gone through the nonexistent Wimberley without learning much of anything. But the more he thought about it, the more he knew he'd have to return that night—to see what was really buried in that plot of ground by Armstrong's barn.

The farmhouse was dark when he returned about ten o'clock and the little Swedish car he'd seen in the driveway was gone. Armstrong

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was away and that was Rand's good fortune. Though the grave by the side of the barn could not be seen from the house, Rand would have had to be more careful about noise with an occupant in the house.

But he knew the bearded man might return at any time, and he parked his own car some distance down the road, in a patch of tall weeds that helped shield it in the darkness. He'd bought a shovel at a hardware store in a nearby village and he carried it around the house to the barn. The earth was soft and easy to dig, but he tried not to think about what he might find. Was it better for Hastings to be a defector to Moscow or to be dead in this unlikely grave? Better Red or dead?

Rand had to go down about five feet before he struck something unyielding. Stooping in the narrow hole he'd dug, he snapped on a small flashlight. The body had been wrapped in heavy cloth before burial and he'd have to dig a bit more before he could rip through the fabric.

He heard the unmistakable cocking of a pistol above his head. "Come out of there, Rand," a familiar voice said. "With your hands up."

It wasn't the bearded Mr. Armstrong. It was Parkinson, and he had a revolver pointed at Rand's head.

Rand climbed slowly out of the hole and put up his hands. "So you knew he was here all the time."

"I don't know what you're talking about. I do know that security is very disturbed with your prowling around here. They sent me to bring you back without a fuss."

"Is that what the gun's for?"

"You're not one of us any longer, Rand. I can't give you any special treatment."

"Do you have orders to shoot me if I resist?"

"All force necessary."

"Damn it, Parkinson, what's so important about this place? What are they keeping secret after all these years?"

"Operation Cowbarn. It saved a good many lives—"

"I know about that. They had lights all over these fields, and when the German bombers came across the English Channel they thought it was London and unloaded their bombs."

"It worked at least once," Parkinson admitted. "They only had to fool the first plane. Once the lead aircraft dropped its bomb load, the others followed suit."

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"But why all the secrecy now?"

Parkinson sighed and shook his head. "All right, to hell with them," he said at last. "There's no reason why you shouldn't know. Wimberley was never much of a village—only a couple of dozen residents. That's why they picked it in the first place. It had the perfect location, on the bomber route to London, and not many people to be relocated. The trouble is, something went wrong that night. One family, in a house down the road, didn't get the message. The Germans came over and dropped their bombs, and five people died. Perhaps five thousand lives were saved in London, but that wasn't the point. Those five died because of government bungling, so the story had to be hushed up. The bureaucracy at work, after all these years."

"And you killed Hastings for that?"

"Damn it, Rand, we know nothing about Hastings! I've told you—"

And then all at once the fields beyond the barn came alive with light. Rand turned, unable to believe his eyes, and Parkinson lowered the gun in amazement. "What is it?" Rand started to ask, and then he heard the planes.

They were coming in low from the channel, just as they had back in 1940. "Run!" Parkinson shouted. "They're going to bomb us!"

Rand squinted toward the sky and saw the bombs hurtling toward earth. In some insane way, he was back in 1940 when German bombers had wiped the village of Wimberley from the face of the earth. He hit the ground and covered his head and waited for the first explosion.

There were a few soft thuds, but not the bomb blast he'd expected. As the sound of the planes dwindled in the distance, he uncovered his face and looked up. Parkinson was nowhere in sight. Out in the field, among the strings of glowing light bulbs, lay a dozen or more big bales.

Rand reached the nearest one and cut through the burlap wrapping with a pocket knife. He wasn't surprised by what he found. Marijuana. And judging by the size of each bale, there was about a ton of it in the field.

Then a bullet thudded into the burlap next to him and he had no time to think of anything else. He hit the ground and tried to crawl behind the bale of marijuana as the firing increased. It was someone with a rifle out beyond the lights.

He waited, pressed against the bale and the ground, until a final

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burst of gunfire was followed by silence. Then, from far off, he heard Parkinson shouting, "I've got him, Rand! Come on up!"

Rand hesitated a moment, and then stood up. You had to trust somebody once in a while.

There were no more shots, and he followed Parkinson's voice to the top of a rise. "I saw the flashes from his rifle and circled around," Parkinson said. "Got him with the first shot."

Philip Buyer's face was grimaced with pain as Rand's flashlight hit it. He was holding a bloody cloth to his shoulder. "What did you do with Hastings?" Rand asked. "Is he buried by the barn?"

Buyer shook his head. "That's Armstrong's calf. Your man is still alive, down at my house."

Rand took a deep breath. "We'll bring him along," he told Parkinson.

Buyer's farm was on the other side of the hill, and they found Hastings gagged and handcuffed to a cot in the basement. He smiled when the gag came off and said to Rand, "I was hoping you'd find me. Was it the calendar?"

"Yes," Rand said. "How did you stumble into this thing?"

"I've been using that calendar to help me find a nice rural area for my retirement. When Wimberley wasn't in the atlas I checked with the postal officials and found it ceased to exist in the autumn of 1940. When I checked the wartime records and found classified information about Operation Cowbarn I was very curious. I'd decided to make a down payment on a cottage near Canterbury anyhow, so I took a bank draft from my account, borrowed some documents about Wimberley, and drove out here two weekends ago."

Rand nodded. "They thought you'd defected to Moscow with the money and documents."

"My *God!*"

"How did Buyer find you?"

"I was walking in the fields when I came upon these strings of lights. It was as if I'd stepped back in time more than forty years! Buyer caught me there with his rifle and has held me prisoner ever since."

"Why didn't he kill you?"

"He had a partner who said they couldn't risk it. I told them I was a government official and that scared them."

"The partner was Buyer's neighbor, Seth Armstrong?"

"No—a younger fellow named Tony. Armstrong knew nothing of

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what they were doing. That's why the two little channel-hopping planes always made their marijuana drops on Tuesday nights, when he was off playing cards with a neighbor and couldn't see the lights go on in the fields."

Parkinson came down from the first floor. "I've telephoned London and the local police. We'll fade out of it and let the locals take credit for the drug arrest. They'll get Buyer to the hospital."

"One more thing," Rand said to Hastings. "If you were just off for a country weekend, why did you leave the calendar as a clue for me?"

"I didn't, not really. I was looking at the picture again before I left on Friday, to refresh my memory, and I forgot to turn the page back. Later I hoped you'd notice it."

"Did you ever contact the man who took the picture?"

Hastings looked blank. "I never thought of that."

"I did," Rand said.

Rona Jacobs opened the door for him the following morning. She didn't seem surprised to see him again. "I thought you might be back," she said, brushing the hair from her eyes.

"The police made a narcotics raid near Wimberley last night," Rand told her.

She stared at him. "But Wimberley doesn't exist."

"It was back on the map long enough for two planes to drop over a ton of marijuana there last night. But you know about that. Your brother found the site in the first place, didn't he? He was researching his father's negative when he heard the old stories about the fake lights to trick the Germans. He and Philip Buyer decided it was the perfect spot for a big narcotics drop. They bought a nearby farm in Buyer's name and rigged lights to guide the planes for their drop, just like in 1940. Buyer actually sent me down to the farm where the lights were, but he had no way of knowing I'd return after dark and see them turned on for the drop."

"Did Philip tell you all this?"

"He didn't have to. Hastings, the man they were holding prisoner, identified a morgue shot of your brother this morning. *You* shot him, didn't you Rona?"

"I—"

"When I came here on Monday you told me the killer stole the negative of the calendar photo, but that was before I even told you which one I wanted. There was no robbery, was there?"

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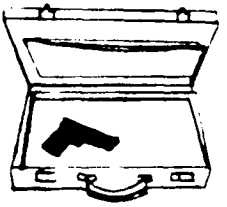
She sat and covered her face with one hand. "No. Tony had told me about the marijuana and that seemed harmless enough. But when I heard they were holding someone prisoner, and arguing about whether to kill him, it was more than I could take. Philip was never any good. He ruined my brother's life. Tony had a gun and I was afraid he might use it on the prisoner. I tried to get it away from him and it went off. He was alive one minute and then he was dead. I tried to make it look like a robbery because I was afraid of what I'd done, but I gave you the information about Wimberley hoping you'd get to Philip and rescue that man."

"We did," Rand said.

She lifted her head. "Now I want to speak with the police."

"There's one waiting outside," Rand told her gently. "I'll call him."



DETECTIVERSE

NO GOLD WATCH

by BARBARA JOYCE WEIL

Double-C keeps igniting Rand's ire.
They just can't seem to let him retire.
Hastings has in mind
Jobs of a kind
That no married man would desire.

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You're familiar with the story of Bonnie and Clyde? Meet Barb and Harry . . .

GOODBYE, WARDSBORO

by MARGE BLAINE

Robbing the bank was easy. Harry had it all planned out. All things worked just the way he said they would.

We even got the three cars we needed for the job without any trouble. Not that you'd expect trouble from the rental we picked up at the Burlington Airport the day we arrived. Harry had fake I.D. The papers were done by a pro—someone he met last time he was in prison. They said he was Henry Jones, District Manager, Boston Office, Massachusetts General Life Insurance Company.

Actually he's Harry Jenkins, also known as Harry the J, and we're from Hartford, Connecticut, not Boston. The only part of the I.D. that was even a little bit true was the insurance part. I work for Connecticut Continental, so if there were any questions I'd be able to help Harry answer them.

I'm a receptionist in the Survivor Benefits Section, and I don't miss a thing that goes on. Even my boss, Mr. Pruitt, admits that. Just last week he said, "You know everything that happens here. And you don't keep any of it under your hat!"

Mr. Pruitt is one of the reasons I decided to go along with Harry on this job. I can't stand him. He always has an excuse to stop by my desk, making sure I'm working every minute. He has a fit when he sees me doing my nails. But what does he expect me to do when I'm not busy?

Harry checked us in at the Holiday Inn south of the city as Mr. and Mrs. Henry Jones. I wished the Mr. and Mrs. part wasn't a lie too. Harry and I have known each other a couple of months. Only he'd never let me get close to him. He'd see me only two or three

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times a week, and he never let me sleep over. So it was a real surprise when he asked me to go along with him on this Burlington business.

"These small city banks are a piece of cake, Barb," he told me. "Cash drawers stuffed, sometimes not even a guard on duty. They don't expect any trouble out in the sticks. We'll pick up a bundle. Maybe twenty or thirty grand. Think of what we can do with that!"

It wasn't hard for me to make my decision. I mean, a week alone with Harry! It'd be just the two of us, far away from the city and the people we knew. Almost like a honeymoon. And if things worked out the way I hoped they would, there could even be a real honeymoon afterward.

Harry figured out exactly what we should wear—grey sweatpants and hooded sweatshirts, large for Harry, medium for me. He picked both sets up in a K-Mart north of town so no one'd wonder what a good-looking blonde was doing buying work clothes. He picked up ski masks from another store and large towels to wrap around our middles so they wouldn't be able to identify us from our shapes. I was amazed when I tried everything on. No one's had any trouble knowing I was a girl since I was about twelve, but in that outfit even I couldn't tell.

We drove around Burlington for a couple of days, deciding which bank to hit. There were three branches of Central Vermont Savings, advertised as "The Biggest in Burlington." I wanted to go for the one in town. Office people streamed in and out of there all day and I figured it'd have the most cash. But Harry said that the shopping center would be better. "Security's lighter," he explained, "and it'll be easier to hop into a car afterward and disappear. What if we hit a traffic jam in the city? Or some guy runs into us going through a red light? Trust me, babe. I've done this before."

I snuggled against him, pressing my head into the curve of his neck. "Sure, Harry," I told him. "Anything you say."

On the big day everything went smoothly. I've had more trouble picking out a card for my mother's birthday.

A little before noon Harry drove the rental to a Howard Johnson's about half a mile from the shopping plaza where the bank was. From one end of the parking lot we watched for the right car. "Look for one of those guys in a suit. In a car with local plates," Harry told me. "He'll take at least an hour for lunch. With any luck we'll have the car back before he's even served." Finding the keys in the car

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we eventually took was an added bonus. Harry could've started it anyway, but the keys made it easier.

I wriggled into my sweat clothes as Harry drove the borrowed car to the bank. Then he pulled over and switched seats with me so he could change. I parked directly in front of the bank, where it said NO PARKING—LOADING ZONE. We put on the ski masks and were in and out in less than five minutes. I didn't even hear an alarm go off.

On the way back to the Howard Johnson's, my hands shook as I changed back into street clothes. But Harry's hands were firm on the wheel. I don't think robbing the bank had bothered him at all.

"Wait'll they take a look at the films of the holdup," he chortled. "Two chunky figures. That's what they'll see—and that's what they'll look for. No one'll guess it was us. We did it, Barb. You and me, babe. And just think of the fun we'll have spending all that money."

"Yeah, Harry." I tried to keep my voice steady.

"And what if they trace the license plates to the poor sucker who owns this car—he'll probably have witnesses that he was eating lunch but he'll still have some explaining to do."

We parked the car close to where we'd gotten it. Harry packed the clothes and the money in two Jordan Marsh shopping bags and we slipped them from the borrowed car back into our rental, wiping the steering wheel of any fingerprints we might have left. In a few minutes we were in our room at the Holiday Inn—Mr. and Mrs. Jones back from a business deal, calling room service for lunch.

I was in the mood to celebrate, but Harry couldn't relax. He paced back and forth, going over the rest of the plan. I escaped to the bathroom and a hot bath. Harry's voice drifted in, mixing with the steam and the scent of Jean Naté. "We'll pick up a dark-colored car. A year or two old, not flashy, Massachusetts plates. We can't have Mr. Jones driving a Florida car, could we?"

"No, Harry."

"Did you notice how these tourists sack out early? I'll pay our bill after dinner and we can grab the car about midnight. No one'll miss it until after breakfast tomorrow. By that time we'll be back safe in Hartford."

I only half listened as I dozed in the tub. It'd be goodbye, Mr. Pruitt, goodbye, Continental Insurance. So long. Farewell. From now on it was Harry and me. Of course I'd have to keep an eye on him. Make sure he didn't fall for anyone else. We could take a

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trip—to L. A. or Hawaii. Maybe even a cruise. I'd buy whatever I wanted without having to worry about how much it cost.

We left the Holiday Inn around eleven-thirty in a dark-blue Buick Regal with cushioned seats, our luggage in the back seat—my two suitcases, Harry's overnight bag, and the shopping bags. Harry put copies of the *Burlington Banner* on top of the shopping bags so you couldn't see what was in them. There was more than ten thousand dollars in cash, a third of it mine.

Harry said we'd better keep off the main highways, where there could be state cops. Not that they'd be looking for us, but they might stop the car for a spot check. So we followed old Route 2 instead of the Interstate, to 100 going south. It was dark out, pitch black. There was nothing but trees, fields, and a few houses. No movies. No stores. No motels or diners. I don't know how the people who lived there stood it. I mean, what did they *do*?

A couple of times Harry switched on the radio to get the news. The robbery was the top story. But all they said was, "The police have no clues."

We managed to make good time for the first couple of hours. There was hardly any traffic, so Harry kept the car at between fifty and sixty. It was around someplace like Walden or Waker, way in the middle of nowhere, that the Buick started sputtering. It got worse every time we went up or down a hill. And that's all there was around there—hills. A couple of times I thought the motor was going to cut out completely.

"Harry?" For the first time since we'd left Hartford I really felt scared. "What are we gonna do?"

"You're askin' me? Do I look like an auto mechanic? All I know about cars is how to start 'em, drive 'em, and steal 'em."

"Can't we pick up another car and leave this one?"

Harry shook his head. "Around here? Are you crazy? Just stop in front of one of these houses and all hell'll break loose. Country people have dogs. And they sleep with rifles next to their beds. They'd shoot us both the minute we *touch* one of their cars."

I don't know how I lived through the next half hour. Harry drove hunched over the wheel, his brow furrowed, as though he could keep the car going just by willing it to. We passed a couple of inns, tightly shuttered for the night, and a general store with a gas pump in front of it, dark and locked. Sometimes the motor started to sound okay, but before we had a chance to relax the noises came back worse than ever.

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Then, as we came around one of the sharp curves we were almost getting used to, we saw a light at the side of the road. It was a gas station. And it was open!

Harry signaled left, pulled across the road, and cut the motor. A paunchy man, dressed in grease-stained coveralls, shuffled out. He was old, about fifty. *Billy Boy* was stitched in red across the front of his shirt.

"Ev'nin'," he greeted us.

"Hi," Harry answered, pouring on the charm. "Fill 'er up, will you, and check the front? We've been having a little problem on the hills. Maybe you can tell what's wrong."

"Mebbe. We'll see." He didn't look as though he had all his marbles, but then what can you expect in the middle of the night way out in the sticks? All we could do was hope he knew cars.

A radio was blasting country music from the office. Inside, where he'd been sitting, the sound must've been deafening. Or maybe he was hard of hearing. He waddled around to the side of the car, hooked up the hose, and the no-lead gas gauge started clicking away. He held the hose the entire time like he thought it might stop working unless he helped it.

"Lessee, now," he finally drawled. "That's fifteen even."

Harry got out and followed the old man to the front of the car. Billy raised the hood and prodded here and there with a dirt-encrusted finger.

"Oil's fine," I heard him mutter. "So's the radiator. Fan belt's okay too." Then he whistled under his breath. "Take a look at them sparks. Ya kin see a couple've gone bad right there. Nice car like this, you oughta give it a tune-up regular. Those plugs look like they ain't been touched since you bought the car."

"Blame the garage where I get it serviced," Harry told him. "Can you fix them?"

"*Fix* 'em? Nah." Billy Boy shook his head. "You can't fix plugs."

"Then what'll we do?" Harry sounded frantic. "We're on our way back to—Boston. I've got an early-morning meeting I have to make. The way the car's been going, I'm afraid we'll get stuck on the road."

"You shure will. Can't get very far with sparks like them. I didn't say I couldn't fix the *car*. That's no problem. Gotta *replace* the plugs. I ken do that fer you real easy."

Harry's shoulders sagged with relief. "Gee, that's great. How long will it take?"

"Half hour. Mebbe more. Depends on how much traffic pulls in.

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Some nights there's nary a soul. Other times cars jest keep a'comin'. Pull 'er in there." Billy pointed to the brightly lit work area behind the pumps.

Harry slipped back behind the wheel. "Harry," I whispered, leaning over so the old man couldn't hear. "Do you think it's all right?"

"I don't know. We don't have much choice. But he seems to know about cars. I'll just stay real close—make sure he doesn't get a good look at what we've got in the back seat."

After he parked, Harry and I both left the car. He walked over to stand next to Billy Boy, who was pulling long red wires out from under the hood and dumping them on the ground. I went and stood near the door, hoping for some fresh air.

"Ain't you folks out pretty late?" the old man asked.

"I guess so," Harry admitted. "We were staying at an inn, back in—Warren." (*That* was the name of the town we'd passed, I thought admiringly. Harry doesn't miss anything.) "The weather was so nice we just couldn't tear ourselves away."

"Yup. Been a real nice spell. Gets like that sometimes in the fall." I don't know why Harry bothered to talk to the old man but I heard him asking if he lived nearby.

"Shure. Born and raised in Wardsboro. That's right over the hills. This here's West Wardsboro. Good skiing in the winter. People comin' from all over. Massachusetts. New York. Connecticut."

"Did you ski when you were a boy?"

"Didn't have no ski slopes in them days. It shure was rough findin' a job."

"Was that when you started working at the garage?"

The old man shook his head. "Nah. I only been workin' on cars a coupla years. Done more things'n I kin remember, I reckon. Worked in a factory over in North Adams. My littlest girl weren't more'n two then. Only got home weekends. Don't know how I managed to stick it out a whole year, the way I missed them kids."

Harry smiled and nodded, looking like he was interested in this guy's life story. "Ran the general store in South Wardsboro. My wife's uncle owned it. Not much money in groceries. Then I tried farmin'. Let me tell you, son, don't ever farm. It's just sweat and tired bones, with nothin' much to show for 'em come the end of the year."

"Do you own this place?"

"Nah. It's my son-in-law's. Only he don't have time to run it, so

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I started studyin' auto repair. You kin learn it right by mail. Suits me fine. What kinda work you do?"

"I'm in banking," Harry told him. "The banking business. And doing very well at it too." I almost cracked up.

The gas smells in the garage and the noise of the radio were getting on my nerves. I had to get away from there. It was dark all around the station. I walked up and down, staying in the lights. Who knows what was out there in the dark? Dogs. Maybe even *bears*. Why couldn't the old man hurry up?

Cars pulled into the station twice. Each time Billy Boy lumbered out, sold them gas, and shuffled into the office with the money. The second time I called after him: "Would you please make the radio lower? I can't hear myself think."

"Shure thing, ma'am," he said, turning it off completely. But in a way the silence was even worse. It made you realize there was no one else around. I went back to the garage.

"How come you stay open all night?" Harry was asking Billy Boy.

"Wa-all," he drawled. "In the winter it's real busy here. Cars backed up two, three miles from the slopes in both directions. There's steady traffic all night, so it pays to be open. Now? I jest got in the habit, I guess."

When Billy went to get something from a back shelf, Harry joined me at the door. "Hey, babe, looks like he's almost done. We'll be back on the road in no time."

"I can't wait. This place gives me the creeps."

"Listen," Harry dropped his voice so low I could hardly hear it, "stopping here was real lucky."

I agreed. "We wouldn't've gotten far the way the car was."

"Nah—it's more than that. I got a look around the office when Billy Boy finished with his first sale. Guess what's in the register!"

"Forty dollars? Fifty?"

Harry shook his head. "It's stuffed! There's got to be five or six hundred bucks in there!"

"You're kidding! In a place like this?"

"I'm not kidding. I checked again when he was out the second time. These yokels aren't used to stickups. They probably keep the whole day's receipts. And we're gonna take it with us when we go."

"Gee. That poor old guy. Maybe we shouldn't, Harry. He was so nice to us."

"Listen, don't worry about him. He'll probably try to soak us for the job. Charge us three or four times what it's worth. And why

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sneeze at an easy couple of hundred? It'd mean a fur jacket." Harry pulled me close. "Or a ring, babe."

"Okay, Harry. Sure. You're in charge."

"Ssh. Keep your voice down now. We'll wait till he's finished with the car, go into the office with him, I'll make like I'm gonna pay him—and pull the gun instead. You clean out the register and cut the telephone wires so he can't call for help. There doesn't seem to be a car here either. Then it'll be goodbye, Wardsboro, West Wardsboro, South Wardsboro, or wherever-it-is we are."

We walked back to where the old man had his hands buried in the mess of wires. How he'd ever get them straight was a mystery to me.

"Almost done," he told us. "Just gotta fit this here plug where it belongs. You won't have any more trouble with the car now."

"Thanks. Thanks a lot," Harry told him. "I appreciate what you've done for us."

The old man wiped his hands on a dirty rag and slammed down the hood.

A few minutes later we were back on the road, the car running like new. I held my bag carefully. It was stuffed with bills from the register, most of them wrinkled and greasy. I hoped they wouldn't stain my bag.

We hadn't gone more than a mile or two when we found a barricade across the road. A police car, its lights out, was waiting for us in the darkness. Harry pulled to the side. "Let me handle this, Barb."

A tall young policeman strode over to the driver's side, his gun drawn. "Just keep your hands where I can see 'em," he ordered.

Billy Boy appeared out of the darkness. I don't know how he got there. I started to feel scared again. Real scared.

"Watch 'em," the old man warned. "They're real tricky."

"Get out," the cop told Harry. "And turn around. Real slow." He held a gun right up to Harry's head while Billy Boy got Harry's gun.

"Trying to hold up my old dad, hmm?" the cop said. "Now give him back what you took."

Harry motioned for my bag and I handed it to him through the window.

"I'm real sorry for what I did, sir," Harry said.

"Yep. Sure. I bet you are." Billy Boy's voice hardened. "You're not goin' to get away with the other job either."

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"What other job?" Harry tried to act innocent, but I had the feeling it wasn't going to work any more than his apologetic act.

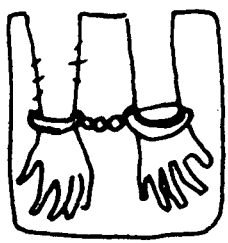
"Burlington. Thought you might be the ones when you drove in. But when you went for my cash I was sure." Billy Boy chuckled. "Once a cop, always a cop. Fergot to mention it. Lessee. That was after the general store. 'Afore I tried farmin'. But bein' a cop didn't pay enough either."

"You were a cop?"

Billy Boy nodded. "Yup. Still listen to the police calls. And there's a little doohickey I kin press, right next to the register. Tells my boy here when somethin's up. You'd be surprised how many punks head down Route 100 thinkin' it's safe." He shook his head. "That bank in Burlington's offerin' a reward. Ten percent of what you took. It shure is handy bein' the only all-night station around."

The cop motioned Harry toward the police car and Big Billy got into the driver's seat of the Buick next to me. He made a U-turn and followed the cruiser back the way we'd come. I could see Harry sort of scrunched down in the front seat.

We'll be spending some time together, all right. Under the roof of the county jail. About the only good thing was he wouldn't be looking for another girl friend. The cops will make sure of that.



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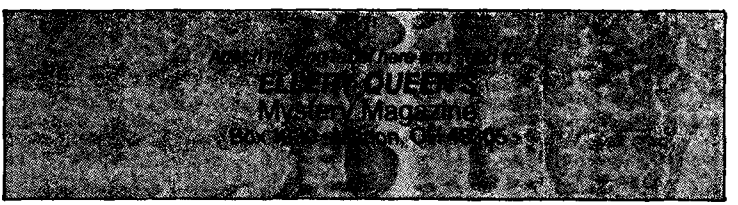

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No one Brian knew shared his interest in crimes and the detectives that solved them, and so when he started to talk about it they were usually rude . . .

A CRIME CHILD

by H. R. F. KEATING

There are football-fact children. There are car-make children. There are train-number children. But Brian was a crime child. He couldn't remember what had first made him interested in crimes and the detectives that solved them, but by the time he was nine—which was nearly a year ago—he had used every Book Token he had got for his birthday, and all the money, buying paperbacks about the way crooks operated and the way the police caught them.

He could tell you all about the great Brink's robbery, which happened in Boston, Massachusetts. And the trouble was, really, that he often did.

The football-fact fans had other football-fact fans to swap facts with. And so did the car-make nuts. And the train-number idiots. But no one that Brian knew shared his interest, and so when he started to talk about it they were usually rude.

"Well, Brian—" they would say after he had produced some jolly interesting piece of information, like how if someone comes into a store twice in an evening asking whether they've got the latest edition of the paper, it means they're casing it out for a holdup. "Well, Brian—suppose they just wanted the paper."

And that made it all the more annoying once when he was in the paper shop near the school with Mike and a girl called Felicity. A funny-looking old man had come in and asked for the evening paper, and the proprietor had said, "No, I told you before, I haven't got one." So he had felt that he had got to warn him that his shop was going to be robbed. But the proprietor had just laughed and said, "No, lad, that's only old Bones. A bit batty he is, and always coming in wanting a paper. So I always tell him I haven't got one. No harm in him."

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"Well, Brian—" Mike had said outside. "Got any more sure and certain signs of a crime?"

And Felicity had giggled so much she had spit out her bubblegum. Served her right.

So Brian never asked anybody to come with him on Friday mornings in the summer holidays when he used to stake out the pedestrian bridge over the canal. He was afraid that nothing would happen, though he felt certain in his heart of hearts that one day it would. He had worked the whole thing out: it was bound to be the place.

Long, long ago—when he was eight—he had seen more than once on television, on *Junior Police Five*, the route that a bank-robbery gang took after they had done a job.

They would come up to whichever bank it was in a car they had stolen especially. Generally that would be quite soon after the bank had opened, when it was nice and quiet. And most often it would be on a Friday, when there was a lot of money in the banks for people to draw out for the weekend. Then, once they had grabbed the loot, they would race out to the stolen car and drive away fast—till they got to someplace like the pedestrian bridge over the canal, a place where any chasing cars couldn't follow. They would leap out there, run across the bridge with the bags of cash, and jump into a different car that another member of the gang would have ready waiting.

And there was nowhere better for this trick than the bridge over the canal. The banks in the High Street were about a quarter of a mile away. There was a good road running from there to the near side of the narrow bridge, and on the far side of the bridge lay a nice quiet side street leading nowhere, just right for a second getaway car to wait in without any trouble.

It was the ideal situation. And one Friday morning, Brian knew, some gang was going to take advantage of it. He just hoped it wouldn't be in term time, because he was determined he was going to be there to see it happen if he could. And to get the car number and good descriptions of the gang members. Then when he told the police, perhaps they'd show him through the station, or let him ride in a cruiser. They could pretend he'd got lost and they were taking him home. By a sort of roundabout way.

On the Friday that was different from all the others he had arrived at the special hiding place he had found on the far side of the bridge even earlier than usual. It had been raining hard all night and looked as if it was going to start again soon, so he had hurried off

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while he could still make his way there without getting wet. He'd once spent an hour after he'd got caught in a shower hidden in his place—it was a narrow space between two of the big iron girders that held up the bridge—and he thought it must have been doing that which had given him such a stinking awful cold.

This Friday, almost as soon as he had settled in, a car drove up—a car with just one man in it, who didn't get out and walk away when he had parked but just sat there with the car engine running, pretending to look at a newspaper.

This is it, Brian said to himself. I knew it would happen one day, and now it's going to.

For just a moment he wished he'd never come. What if he got something wrong—say, he couldn't remember the car number or something? He ought to have brought a pencil to write it down with. Only he hadn't brought any paper.

But he repeated and repeated the number to himself—EJJ 238J, EJJ 238J, EJJ 238J—and hoped it would be all right whatever happened.

Then he looked at his watch. It was important to know the time of arrival of the suspicious vehicle.

It was only a quarter to nine. The banks didn't open till nine-thirty. The getaway driver was going to have a long time to wait.

It was then that he had his great idea. He'd always imagined the second car arriving only just before the men with the stolen cash came thundering across the bridge. But if this one had come so early, there would be masses of time to get to the nearest phone box and tell the police about it before the others came. Then the police could be waiting for them on the spot, and he would actually see the arrests.

He slid out of his hiding place and went quickly down the quiet side road, on the opposite side from the parked getaway car, to where on previous expeditions he had located a phone box just in case. And he knew the number of the police station, and the number of the car—EJJ 238J.

He got through without any trouble. It was all going like a dream.

"I want to report some suspicious circumstances," he said.

"Yes, madam."

It took him a moment to recover from that. But he did. "I'm not a madam. I'm a boy, and I want to tell you about a getaway car that's parked in Hillingdon Road. Car number EJJ 238J."

The man at the police station listened to everything he had to say.

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In silence. Brian rather wished he would interrupt. Or say, "Just a moment, I'd better put out an all-stations call."

But he didn't. He just listened right to the end, and then he said: "All right, sonny. You've had your bit of fun. Now hop off the line quick, like a good lad, it might be wanted for a real emergency."

Brian thought of telling him that this was the real emergency, but he didn't think he'd be able to convince him. And then the line might be wanted for an emergency as well—a road accident, say, or some old lady losing her cat. He rang off.

Slowly and sadly he went back to the bridge, really because he couldn't think of anything else to do. He went right past the man in the car this time—he was still reading his paper—but he didn't bother to look at him. He reached his hiding place and settled down in it. What's the good of crime, he thought. S'pose I'll have to try and get interested in football.

And then, round the corner at the end of Hillingdon Road, there came a police car, going rather fast, taking the corner with a squeal of tires.

It's them. It's the police. They listened. I was right.

The thoughts flashed through Brian's head. He jumped up from his squatting position and peered out along the road.

The police car drew up sharply just beside EJJ 238J. The cop who wasn't driving got out and approached the man with the newspaper.

Golly, suppose he pulls out a gun and starts firing.

But the man didn't. He just lowered his paper, switched off the car engine, and listened to what the policeman had to say. Then he pulled out something from his pocket—it was probably his driver's license—and talked for a bit while the policeman examined it. And finally the policeman gave it back to him and returned to the cruiser. It drove away.

The man in the car sat staring in front of him. Brian could see the look of annoyance on his face even through the windshield. He dodged back into hiding.

And that was what must have given his position away. Because the next moment the man flung the car door open, bounced out, and came walking fast, straight toward him.

Oh, golly, Brian thought.

But that wasn't the worst of it. All the rain in the night had created a huge sticky patch of mud just to the side of the path going up to the bridge, and as the man came up to the place between the

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two tall girders his feet went right into it. His shoes sank in till the mud squelched over their tops.

So by the time he reached Brian, he was in a doubly tearing rage.

"You—you little sneak!" he shouted. "What do you mean poking your little nose in where it's not wanted, getting a good honest man having a quiet read of his paper in the warm because he's too early for an appointment into trouble with the police? And my license out of date, too! I've got a good mind to haul you out of there and give you what you deserve!"

Brian just shrank back farther and farther into his hiding place and wished some black doors would open behind him and let him fall into a sort of nothingness where nothing ever happened and nothing you did ever did anything to any other person ever. But at last the man ran out of nasty things to say and turned back and squished his way through the mud again and along to his car. When he got into it he started up the motor once more and drove away fast.

Brian sat where he was, wishing he'd never got interested in crime, that he had never learned how most bank raids happen, that it had rained all morning and stopped him coming out.

So deep was his misery that it was some time before he took it in that heavy steps, three or four sets of them, were coming thundering along the bridge above him. And that just where car EJJ 238J had been waiting another car had drawn up, plunging into its place as if it was on the point of being late.

It was it.

It was happening.

And this time it really was the right thing. Brian quickly squirmed out of his hiding place and looked up at the bridge. Yes, there were three men running along it and each of them was lugging a pair of bulky black-polythene sacks. The loot. The stolen cash. And the driver of the car that had just pulled up had jumped out and was flinging open its trunk ready for the others to throw in the sacks.

It was it. It really, really was.

Brian hopped up and down in sheer delight.

And that was when the driver of the getaway car saw him.

"A kid!" he yelled. "There's a blooming kid there!"

Which was when Brian made his big mistake. If he had pretended just to have been playing the men might have left him to it. But he didn't pretend he didn't understand exactly what was going on. He knew he had been spotted, and he ran.

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But there was only one way to go—down Hillingdon Road. He started to get over to the opposite side from the car, but it was no good. The driver was very nippy on his feet, and before Brian had gone ten yards he had him firmly gripped by his T-shirt and a moment later he was pushing him painfully by the neck down onto all fours on the ground just at the edge of that sea of mud.

"Gawd," Brian heard him say, "what are we gonna do? Little bleeder's sure to have seen the car number. I told you we ought ter 'ave nicked one for this part of it, too. What are we gonna do?"

"Aw, give 'im a good kick and let 'im go," another voice said. "Little kid like that'll never be able ter describe us."

Oh, that's right, too, Brian thought, his face near the slimy mud. I couldn't describe them. I never really looked at them. And the car number, I didn't even look at that!

But then a sudden realization came to him.

If he hadn't been able to see the number of this car in the short time it had been there and with all the excitement of the men coming pounding over the bridge, he could see it now, despite his face being held down so close to the muddy puddle. He could see it quite clearly through his legs. JPD 269N.

Yes, but would he remember that? Would he be able to remember it with all the things that might happen to him in the next few minutes? Would he—he suddenly felt as if his stomach wasn't there—would he even be around to remember it? If these men were as tough as some bank robbers, the ones who had sawn-off shotguns and used them—

But, though he felt so empty inside that he was almost not there at all, his brain still seemed to be working. Working and whirring. And coming up with an extraordinary idea. He didn't have anything to write a car number on, and, held face-down the way he was, he couldn't have written anything if he had. But there was, bang in front of him, a marvelous writing surface. And he had just the thing to write on it with. His finger.

Heaving himself up a tiny bit, he got his right hand off the ground. Stretching forward just a few inches, he found a smooth area of mud that was just right. And there, digging deep into the firm gluggy stuff, he traced out the number—JPD 269N.

He was lucky the driver didn't notice him because something else had been distracting his attention. "Blimey," he was saying, "that's a police siren. This side of the canal. Come on—scarper!"

"Yeah. Push the kid in the mud and let's go."

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Brian felt himself hurtled forward into the squelching muck, hoping he had flung himself enough to the side to have missed those letters inscribed in its sticky surface, and then with mud in his mouth and in his eyes and all up his nose he didn't know what was happening for some time.

The first thing he properly knew was the feel of a hand on his shoulder pulling him upward. Then he realized he was hearing a voice. "It might be the kid who phoned in when we came round here earlier," it said.

Brian rolled over. Yes, it was a policeman. And the cruiser he had seen before was drawn up at the curb a few yards away.

"Listen, sonny," the policeman said. "Did you by any chance see some men get into a car here a few minutes ago?"

"JPD 269N," Brian said.

"You did? And that's the number? Hey, that's pretty good!"

"Oh, come on," said the driver of the car who had come up too, "the kid can't be sure of that, not after being out cold here in a puddle and all. He's making it up."

"No," said Brian. And he pointed to the sticky, firm mud at the puddle's edge, where, plain to see, the car number JPD 269N was still clearly inscribed.

"I'll get on the radio. Car computer. We could be lucky."

The driver wasn't gone very long either, and when he came back his face was wreathed in smiles. "They did it," he said. "Old box o' tricks turned up trumps. Vehicle registered in the name of Arthur Blagrove."

"Awful Arthur," said his mate. "Awful Arthur Blagrove. Well, this time we've got him bang to rights." Then the two of them took down Brian's name in their notebooks, because they said he'd be a necessary witness when it came to the trial. And after that they took him home in the police car. So he did get a ride in one, and without anybody having to make excuses, either. But the nicest thing of all was what happened when they let him out.

He was walking up the garden path, a bit worried about all the mud on his clothes, when he heard just through the cruiser's open window what the driver said to his mate. "You know, that lad'll make a jack one of these days, see if he doesn't."

Brian wasn't quite sure that he remembered what a "jack" was, but he thought he had read in one of his paperbacks that it was police slang for a detective.

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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Metcalfe felt weak in the legs. Seventeen years fell away and he was back in the waiting room of the maternity hospital facing a troubled Dr. Fox, trying to understand what the man was saying. "Something is the matter with the baby. She's having trouble breathing. We'll do everything we can, but I think you should prepare yourself . . ."

A heart-stopping story from William Bankier, at the top of his form . . .

CHILD OF ANOTHER TIME

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Their eyes met and Blake Metcalfe felt as if he had been kicked in the stomach. She couldn't be older than seventeen, young enough to be his daughter. But she held out her glass, and as he filled it with red wine she said: "Hi, my name's Tina Flanagan. I'm the new girl in town."

He introduced himself and heard that she was just down from Toronto. Her father had used influence to get her a job in a Montreal ad agency. It had been her wish to get away from home.

They stood side by side at the drinks table, watching couples dancing in the area occupied by desks and drawing boards during the working day. "I've been watching you," she said. "Do you work here?"

Metcalfe nodded. "I'm one of the old originals. The oldest," he added, providing emphasis that was hardly necessary. At forty-eight, he was going heavy, trousers rolling at the waist, cheekbones covered by a mask of fat. Life was good these days, life was easy. Apex Art Studio was charging clients a premium for his illustrations

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and he was collecting part of that money. He ate big lunches, drank out of habit, went home and made love with Laura as often as most men might with a wife of twenty-five years' standing. Having his ailing mother-in-law in the house was a problem, but then.

Metcalfe found himself looking down at Tina's hair. It was chestnut, thick and wavy, and the way it grew and glistened reminded him of somebody—yes, his daughter Maggie. Good thing Maggie had not made it to the party or she would have been casting sarcastic glances his way, seeing him chatting up the young talent like this. Still only twenty-three, Maggie Metcalfe was fast becoming one of the better illustrators in the advertising department at Rambeau's.

"I have to say it." Tina looked up at him. "I go for older men. I hope you don't mind."

"I'd be lying if I said I mind." There was something so attractive about this plump, pretty kid. Metcalfe couldn't express it other than to admit he felt inclined to pick her up and hold her in his arms. And although there was an element of lust, the attraction was not totally sexual. No, he felt an overpowering affection for her, a disturbing urge to nuzzle her big, smooth face, to tuck his nose into the dimple in her cheek, to inhale whatever soapy fragrance he might find clinging to her.

"It's because I never had a father," she confessed. "I was adopted. My parents leveled with me when I was twelve. I think that's a good idea, don't you? They told me I was chosen because they love me so much." She sipped some wine. "My father is Horace Flanagan, the real-estate man. You must have heard of him."

"Who hasn't. He's the cover story this month in *Locus* magazine."

"See how clever I am." She gave Metcalfe a smile that interrupted his heartbeat. "If you're going to be adopted, choose somebody like Horace Flanagan."

Some of the party left to go to the baseball game, where they would be guests in the Apex box at the Olympic Stadium. The reduced crowd seemed to be settling in for heavy drinking and close dancing. Metcalfe looked at his watch. He had told Laura to expect him around nine. He never stayed till the end at company parties.

"If you're getting ready to go, I'd appreciate a lift," Tina said.

They walked from the building along Notre Dame Street through a cool summer night. The girl fell into step, matching his stride naturally. Not many people did this—most of them asked him where the fire was.

In the car, he asked her where she lived. She told him she had an

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apartment on Durocher Street. "But I don't want to go home yet. Can we go somewhere for coffee?"

Metcalfe avoided the restaurants where he was known, drove to a place down east where he took late nourishment after his occasional solo debaucheries in the strip clubs on The Main. Tina seemed fascinated, listening to the foreign hum of the place, flashing a friendly smile at their French-Canadian waitress.

"This is so nice of you to take me out."

"My pleasure." Had she really forgotten it was her suggestion? He felt like nothing more than coffee and pie but Tina ordered barbecue chicken, fries, roll, and a vanilla milkshake. As she tucked in, she said:

"I love Montreal. For some reason it feels like home to me. Maybe I was born here—my parents have never said where I came from when they adopted me. Is it possible I feel something in my soul, like a salmon that goes back to where it was spawned?"

"It's possible."

"Talk to me while I eat. Tell me about yourself."

Metcalfe seldom opened up to anybody but now he found himself telling this child everything, eager to describe his life to her. He spoke of his early dreams of becoming a fine artist, of having a studio in Paris—a city he had never even visited. He explained his acceptance of the security in the illustrator's life, where he was usually bored, never stretched, by the assignments.

He glowed when he spoke of Maggie and her burgeoning career at the department store. "She's better than I am already." He produced a snapshot from his wallet.

"Looks like somebody I know," Tina said, frowning, dipping a french-fry into a pot of spicy sauce.

Metcalfe went on to talk about his wife, who had resumed her career teaching languages until her mother's illness became so far advanced that the old lady had to be taken into the house where Laura could devote full time to looking after her.

"What is Parkinson's disease?" Tina asked. "I've never come across it."

"I hope you never do. The victim shakes constantly, can't do much of anything for herself, wastes away but very slowly. It can go on for years and years."

"No cure?"

"Sometimes a very tricky brain operation can help if they get to it soon enough. Laura's mum is too late for that." Thinking of the

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old lady with her hideous life sentence and Laura trapped at home as nurse, Metcalfe felt impotent rage.

When they were finished, Tina went to the ladies room. As Metcalfe gave money to the waitress, she said: "Your daughter is a chip off the old block. I can see the family resemblance. She looks like you."

Metcalfe felt weak in the legs. Seventeen years fell away and he was back in the waiting room of the maternity hospital facing a troubled Dr. Fox, trying to understand what the man was saying. "Something is the matter with the baby. She's having trouble breathing. We'll do everything we can, but I think you should prepare yourself. No, we won't say anything yet to Mrs. Metcalfe."

So the baby they had planned to call Angela came and went in one shocking weekend in October. Metcalfe called the department store and managed to get rid of the new crib before Laura came home from the hospital. Somehow they recovered, concentrated on six-year-old Maggie, but the wound never healed completely. To this day, when he remembered the death of Angela, Metcalfe wept.

"Are you all right?" Tina searched his face as she joined him at the restaurant entrance.

"Come on, I'll drive you home."

The suspicion was no more than a whisper in Metcalfe's mind. It was the most incredible nonsense but he listened to it. She was the right age. There was this instant rapport between them, which was much more than an ordinary physical attraction. And now the waitress had said they were father and daughter, she emphasized the resemblance.

Saying goodnight outside Tina's apartment building, he was deluged by clues. That laugh—it was like Maggie's. When she turned her eyes down, they were Laura's eyes. The broad forehead was his own—and the overlapping teeth in the bottom row, why hadn't he noticed them before? That was the Metcalfe bite, his dentist would recognize it.

He drove home at twenty-five miles an hour. The suspicion was right or it was wrong. If wrong, Tina's appearance here, her very existence, was an incredible coincidence. If the suspicion was right, the explanation was even more overwhelming. It would suggest a crime that hardly bore thinking about. Had Dr. Stanley Fox deliberately lied about the baby's condition? Did he, somehow, fake Angela's death, present to Metcalfe through the undertaker a small white coffin—empty—then provide a healthy baby to the millionaire

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Toronto realtor, Horace Flanagan? It *could* be done. Anything could be done with money and Flanagan had plenty of money. But why?

"Why my baby?" Metcalfe said aloud, sitting parked in front of his house.

"Are you staying out there all night?" Laura called in a stage whisper from the open front door.

He went in and pretended he was sick to his stomach to cover his shell-shocked condition. He drank a bromo, then took a cup of black coffee. There was no way he could breathe a word of his theory to Laura. Seventeen years ago, losing the baby had almost wiped her out. To this day, the subject could hardly be discussed.

"How's your mum?"

"She had one of her bad spells this afternoon."

"You should have called me."

"I knew you had the party. I called the doctor, I explained she was getting violent—it's the depression. She brought my silver hand-mirror down, cracked the glass top on the dresser."

"And you were here alone." He had stopped suggesting they institutionalize the old lady. Laura wouldn't consider the provincial hospital—it was a nightmare, the wards and corridors populated with pitiful human wreckage out of an engraving from the Middle Ages. The acceptable alternative was a private nursing-home, but this would cost the world.

"The doctor told me to increase her medication. I don't think she'll act up again." Laura's face was showing new creases, her mouth set in the familiar determined line. She lowered her eyes and Metcalfe saw for a fraction of a second the expression that had crossed Tina Flanagan's face. "Will you go in and speak to her before we go to bed? She looks forward to seeing you."

Metcalfe pulled a chair close to the bed and turned the lamp so his cheery face was illuminated. "Evening, Mum," he said. "I've come from a drunken party. Don't worry, I drank your share, too."

The pale, drugged eyes looked up at him. Her lips parted as she tried to smile and the palsied hand crept towards him across the blanket. Leaning forward to give her a kiss on the cheek, Metcalfe kept smiling but he closed his eyes and held his breath.

For two days, Metcalfe carried the fantastic theory around. It did not evaporate, made ludicrous by the passage of time. It hardened into reality, like an excavated relic of some ancient war. He was going to have to dig in order to verify his suspicion or to dispel the

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delusion. But he would need help and there was only one place where he could find it, one man who would go along without trying to talk him out of it.

Metcalfe took Tuesday afternoon off and drove to the apartment building on Decelles Avenue. The building looked sadly familiar—red brick, three tiers of iron balconies, an entrance decorated with curved concrete like something out of an Alexander Korda film. This was the doorway through which he and Laura had carried baby Maggie on the proud return from the hospital twenty-three years ago. Six years later they had crept in alone, empty-handed, guilty, nothing to show.

On the first occasion, Alphonse Ferrier had been coming up from his basement apartment. Al was the building superintendent, a former policeman expelled for drinking and insubordination. When he saw Maggie, his Indian features produced a proud smile—she might have been his baby.

After the loss of Angela, while Laura was still in the hospital, Metcalfe had wandered into the Texas Tavern around the corner for a few beers to help him sleep. Alphonse Ferrier was alone at a table near the door. He must have heard the news. When Metcalfe sat down, Ferrier pushed one of three glasses of beer toward him and said; "Not very good, is it." There was something stoical, an acceptance of bad luck, in the understatement that reinforced Metcalfe more than all the effusions of sympathy poured over him in the past two days. He relaxed, relieved of the hideous embarrassment.

"Thanks, Al," he said. "Cheers." He drank the glass of beer at one draft and ordered four more. He and the super closed the tavern that night. After that, they drank together once a week until Laura suggested a year later that they get out of the apartment with its melancholy nursery and move closer into the city. Since then, he only managed drinks with Ferrier at Christmas.

Metcalfe parked the car. Ferrier was washing the glass in the front doors. He looked a few pounds heavier. The glossy black hair fell in a thick curtain as he bent to his work.

"Time for a beer, Al."

He stood up with a chamois in one hand, the dark Iroquois eyes finding out everything there was to know about his former tenant who had come back so unexpectedly. "What's the matter?"

"I've got big trouble."

"What can I do?"

"Come and listen to me. Tell me if you think I'm crazy."

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"I can tell you that right now. But I could use a beer."

The tavern wasn't crowded. They took a table by the door, said nothing till the beer came and they had tasted the first one. "You're getting fat, Al."

"I had to stop running." Ferrier used to walk every day to the steps leading up to Beaver Lake. He used to go there, fair weather or foul, and run for miles over pathways covering the mountain. "I did something to a bone in my foot. It's getting better—I'll get back to it."

Metcalfe finished the first glass, drew the next one to him. "Remember when Angela died the day after she was born? Well. You aren't going to believe this. I don't think she died. I think I've seen her."

Ferrier did not look surprised. He never looked surprised. "She'd be a big girl by now. Seventeen years?"

"That's right. I've met a girl that age. From Toronto. She told me she was adopted. A waitress saw us together in a restaurant and said my daughter looks just like me. But, Al, it's more than that. I had a feeling about her right from the start. Before I knew any of this."

Ferrier looked through the doorway, far away down the street. "How could it be?"

"I don't know. The doctor would have had to take my baby out of the hospital somehow. Convince people she died. I don't know why he'd do that."

"Are you going to ask him?"

"Not yet. He'd say I'm crazy, he'd simply deny it. For all I know, he'd be telling the truth. No, Al, I have to do something—"

During their drinking sessions, Ferrier had always been able to read Metcalfe's mind. Now he drew lines with a fingertip in the condensation from the beer glasses, traced the shape of a cross on the table top. "Will you be able to do that?" he asked. "Look in your own baby's grave?"

The weather was good, the risks would never be less. Ferrier took Metcalfe back to the apartment building and fitted them both out with gardener's overalls. He found two pairs of grass clippers, a rake, a spade, and a large canvas bag. With the tools in the bag, they went back to Metcalfe's car and drove to the base of the steps at the side of the mountain.

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"If we go in through the cemetery gate," Ferrier said, "they'll ask us what we want. But there's another way in."

They climbed the steps, Ferrier carrying the bag, walked past Beaver Lake and the chalet, then continued up a grassy slope until they came to a bluff overlooking the cemetery.

"This is the hard part. Follow me." Ferrier began to scramble down the steep face, clutching at shrubs and rocks, sending a cascade of gravel ahead of them. Halfway down, the slope began to level out and the passage became easier. Soon they were on grass, moving through a stand of young birch trees, then they were on a path between marble gravestones.

"You know the way from here?" Ferrier asked.

"I visited once or twice years ago. There's an area set aside for the children."

It was a quiet time of afternoon, the cemetery almost deserted. Metcalfe led the way past rows of monuments, the larger ones casting shadows over the path. They moved into an area where the stones were smaller and beyond to where the graves were marked only by rectangular plaques. "This is it." He was occupying his mind with extraneous details, the length of the grass, the number of laceholes in Ferrier's boot. If he thought about what they were about to do, he knew he would not be able to proceed.

"People over there," Ferrier said, handing his companion a pair of clippers. They bent to the edge of the path and began trimming grass.

Ferrier stood up a while later and made a few passes with the rake. "Okay," he said. "Let's make it fast." He took the spade and went to work, Metcalfe more than willing to leave him to it. The spade was sharp; it cut the turf into neat squares Ferrier dragged to one side. Now he was into dark earth.

Metcalfe had not come with the undertaker to the cemetery. The ceremony in the funeral parlor was enough; he had listened to the prayers and watched them take the small white casket away, then he had gone up to the hospital to sit with Laura.

Ferrier's spade struck something solid. He scraped away the earth to reveal crumbling wood. "Want to leave it to me?"

"Yes, go ahead." Metcalfe turned away, bent to examine a patch of clover, tugged at tendrils of weed twisted through the roots of grass. Ferrier's call brought him around.

"You were right, my friend."

"What?"

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"This is an empty casket." He stirred some fragments of wood as Metcalfe peered over his shoulder. "There was never anything in this box but the lining."

The building had once been somebody's home. Now it was a suite of offices. The automatic switchboard, the telex terminal, the massive electric typewriter all looked expensive. The girl at the reception desk appeared a bit pricey as well. She had been talking on the telephone when Metcalfe came in. Now she set down the phone, picked up a glitter earring, and fastened it to a shell-like lobe.

"Can I help you?"

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Fox. I rang earlier."

"Mr. Metcalfe? Yes, go on through. I'll buzz and tell him you're on the way."

The former Dr. Fox had put on weight. Metcalfe remembered him as a nervous young man with the build of a hungry schoolboy. Now that frame was concealed inside a suitful of flesh. When he stood to greet his visitor, the fat on Fox's chest kept his arms from touching his sides.

"What can I do for you?"

Metcalfe sat down. He could see in Fox's eyes that the man had decided not to remember him. The gun he had borrowed from Alphonse Ferrier felt heavy in his jacket pocket. "When did you stop being a doctor?"

"Quite some time ago. I decided real estate was better for me. After all those years of study, too." Fox made a coarse sound between a cough and a laugh. "Ain't it a bitch!"

Metcalfe decided to get on with it. "Seventeen years ago, you delivered my daughter Angela. You told me she had hyaline membrane, couldn't breathe properly, you said she died the next day. Recently I met a seventeen-year-old girl from Toronto who could be my daughter. I've been told we have a strong resemblance. She's adopted. What do you say, Dr. Fox?"

The heavy face was like damp clay. Mottled patches suggested worms below the surface. "I remember the case, of course. Very tragic. But this girl—you mustn't let something like that play on your imagination."

"I agree. That's why I went to the cemetery and opened the grave. I've just come from there." Metcalfe held onto the gun butt as if he would fall without it. "It's an empty coffin. As you well know."

"Oh, God." Fox buried his face in two bunches of fleshy fingers.

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A couple of gaudy rings stared at Metcalfe. "What are you going to do?"

It was time to show the gun. Metcalfe took it out and let the barrel rest on the edge of the desk to keep it from waving like a baton. "I haven't made up my mind. I may shoot you in the gut. But first I want to know what happened. I want to know who. And why."

"It was Horace Flanagan. He offered me money—so much money I couldn't let it go. Can you imagine somebody putting a quarter of a million dollars in front of you—tax free? He wanted a baby. He and his wife couldn't conceive. They couldn't adopt, either—not in Quebec because they were different religions."

"I don't see the problem. These things happen underground all the time. Girls are in trouble, they have babies and they farm them out."

"Flanagan is a crackpot. He believes the infant from an unwed mother carries bad blood. It wasn't good enough for him. He came to me and told me what he wanted, a child of good parents, cultivated people, talented people. He was ready to buy that baby. I told him no way, but then he named this incredible sum of money. I wanted out—medical practice was killing me, I owed people from my years in college. Flanagan had found this out."

Hearing his suspicion confirmed was almost beyond Metcalfe's belief. "How did you get away with it?"

Fox explained. The maternity hospital was a small place with only a few patients. He had arranged to have Laura Metcalfe induced so the baby would arrive on a Sunday night when a young, inexperienced nurse was on duty. He convinced the nurse the infant needed emergency treatment, said he would drive it to Montreal General himself. He took the newborn child to the Flanagan residence, where a private nurse took over the post-natal care. It was a healthy girl, there were no complications.

"But the undertaker? He staged a funeral service."

"Staged is right. I gave him twenty thousand dollars. Only one man knew about it. I said I performed an autopsy so the coffin was sealed, nobody would want to look inside." Fox took his hands away from his face. "I did a terrible thing."

Metcalfe got up and went to the door. "I'm not sure what I'm going to do with you. I may bring in the police. I may kill you myself." He put the gun in his pocket. "First I want to go and see Flanagan."

Incredibly, Fox tried to mitigate his crime. "Babies do die. It hap-

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pens all the time. It's a terrible thing for the parents but they get over it. Life goes on."

"There's only one thing wrong with that," Metcalfe said. "My baby *didn't* die."

In the days that followed, Metcalfe tried to decide what to do. He was bricked up, he realized, like a frog in a cornerstone. He couldn't tell Laura about his discovery—she would go out of her mind. Nor could he go to Tina Flanagan and explain that he was her real father. The revelation might turn the girl upside down. He had observed during their time together that she had a crush on him. Sexual fantasies had probably taken place in her mind. To learn he was her father—

On the other hand, if he went to Toronto, looked up Horace Flanagan, and faced him with his outrage, the tycoon would surely have him killed. How could the holder of such a threatening secret be allowed to live?

What if Metcalfe were to kill Flanagan? If he did it precipitately and was caught, then the secret would be revealed with Laura and Maggie and Tina left to live with it. And he himself would spend the rest of his life in prison.

What if he took care, murdered Flanagan, and managed to go undetected? It would be a shocking loss for Tina, who obviously loved her adoptive father. How could he do that to her?

There was no direction in which Metcalfe could turn, and yet the urge for revenge was so overpowering he could taste it like a mouthful of copper coins.

A further chilling thought was the realization that Dr. Fox must have telephoned Flanagan the same day and told him about Metcalfe's discovery. The millionaire, a great believer in insurance, could well have set the wheels in motion by this time to have the threat eliminated. So whether Metcalfe took action or not, fate, having shown him the truth about a devastating aspect of his past, might now be about to sort out his future.

"I'd like to have you guys down to the loft for supper in a couple of weeks," Maggie said. She had come for a meal and a visit and was now playing stud poker with her father at the dining-room table, using matches for chips. Laura was in a deep chair marking French papers, a job she did freelance for one of her former colleagues at the school. Her face lit up.

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"Sounds lovely," she said. The evenings at Maggie's place were always entertaining. Odd friends dropped in, there was wine and much spontaneous laughter. The loft was part of a converted clothing factory—spacious, mattress on the floor, painted bricks hung with bright, original work. "Let's make it soon."

"I may have to go to Toronto," Metcalfe said in a tone that cancelled all other plans.

"What does it take to raise a smile around here?" Maggie complained. She shuffled the cards. "New game. Seven-card stud. Deuces, treys, one-eyed Jacks, and low-in-the-hole wild. Everybody prospers."

Two days later, Metcalfe was at the drawing board in his private room at the art studio. The telephone rang. "Metcalfe?" said a resonant voice. "This is Horace Flanagan. Can you come out and talk to me? I'm outside the building."

Metcalfe tried to visualize the tycoon in a telephone booth. "Why not come in here?"

"Better we not be seen together. For both of us. And for Tina."

That was direct enough. Metcalfe felt reassured, as if now the matter was on the table and this man, whose career was built on problem-solving, would do something to make Metcalfe's agony go away. "I'll be right out."

Flanagan had not been calling from a booth. The telephone was in a grey limousine stationed outside the building like a slab of polished glacial rock. The back door opened and Metcalfe climbed into an upholstered interior that resembled a corner of the lobby in an expensive hotel. Horace Flanagan blended into the grey-plush fabric. Only his face emerged—pink-and-white skin, sea-green eyes, sparse white hair, a long upper lip curved in a mild smile, a dimple in a plump, square jaw. This is the man Tina accepts as her father, Metcalfe thought, understanding how it could be so. She loves him. She looks forward to seeing him.

"Thanks for coming out." The car began to roll. "It's after eleven. Have a drink?"

"Rye and water." Metcalfe watched Flanagan open a cherrywood panel and measure whisky into crystal glasses. Here is the man who did this unspeakable thing to me, he thought. Why aren't I at his throat?

"Cheers." Was it actually the best booze he had ever tasted or was it the influence of the experience—drifting silently with a gentle

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surging movement through surroundings tinted green by glass that was probably bulletproof? If the gods went about the world, this was how they did it.

"To the point," Flanagan said. "A terrible coincidence has taken place. I should never have allowed Tina to move to Montreal. But the chance that she would encounter her father, or that you would recognize her, seemed infinitely remote."

"She encountered me," Metcalfe intoned with a hint of mockery. "I recognized her."

"And you went further, Dr. Fox tells me. You opened the grave and established the case. Well, I give you credit, Mr. Metcalfe, for not running amok. I can't say I would have been as controlled. In your position, I reckon I'd have grabbed a gun. There would have been bodies, Tina would have lost two fathers. She would be the ultimate loser."

"And her mother. My wife."

"Of course." The millionaire put his hand on a black despatch case beside him. "But you didn't do that. You have kept the secret, which means there is still a chance for a happy ending."

"I doubt it." Metcalfe's sense of outrage was rising as Flanagan talked on about civilized behavior.

"We can't turn back the clock. I can't give you back your baby. She doesn't exist. She's a young woman and she accepts me and my wife as her parents. We have a sound relationship—we love each other."

"You'd better let me out of the car."

"No, listen. We have only two courses of action open to us. This case contains a lot of money. Half a million dollars. It may sound crass, Metcalfe, but what else can I offer you as compensation? Believe me, money *does* buy happiness. A lot of people achieve it in no other way."

Metcalfe was thinking of Ferrier's gun. It was in his desk at the office, in a bottom drawer buried under a couple of art pads. "You said two courses of action."

Flanagan looked genuinely troubled. "If you refuse to cooperate, I'll have to take steps to protect my own position and the contentment of my family." He glanced through the glass panel at the back of the chauffeur's neck. The driver was not a large man. Narrow shoulders, tendons in the neck, and signs of a scaly scalp suggested an impatient individual, one who took pleasure in carrying out antisocial assignments under the protection of a wealthy patron.

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When Metcalfe said nothing, Flanagan snapped the catches on the despatch case, opened the lid, and placed it on his passenger's knees. The money was real, it was half a million dollars. The sick old lady could be installed in a proper home where she would receive the best of care. Freed from her slavery, Laura could pursue her teaching career, could return to McGill to obtain a better degree. Or why not the Sorbonne—while Metcalfe took that studio within sight of the Seine and gave himself one real chance to develop the talent that had come down to him through the generations? It wasn't too late.

"What's to stop me taking the money," he heard himself saying, "and then going to the police with the story about you and Dr. Fox?"

"Your common sense. Imagine what such an action would do to Tina. I know you love her, she's your daughter. But the man she accepts as her father—and she loves me, believe it—would be involved in a nasty court case. Think of the publicity and how it would affect her."

"At least you'd be in prison where you belong."

"Never. I could buy the Canadian prison system and turn it into a chain of holiday camps. No, I'd suffer from the exposure, but I'd keep my freedom. You, on the other hand, would lose your life in some sort of accident. So your wife would be a widow, your daughter would be fatherless, Tina's life would be a shambles, and you'd be dead. While against that—" Flanagan passed his hand over the case of money.

They were back outside the studio building. By closing the case himself, Metcalfe took possession of the payoff. Clasping the door handle, he said, "Just so you don't think you hold all the cards, I wasn't alone when I opened the grave. A friend was with me. An influential friend. If anything should happen to me, he could tell the whole story."

Flanagan looked respectful. "Who is this influential friend?"

"If you think I'd tell you his name," Metcalfe said as he opened the door, "you must believe I'm suicidal. And homicidal."

Metcalfe spent the afternoon working, then carried the despatch case home with him. He was afraid to let it out of his sight. "It's part of a job I'm working on," he told Laura.

"Al Ferrier telephoned you."

"When?"

"This morning, just after you left for work."

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"I'd better see what he wants." He dialed the number on the kitchen phone. "Al, it's me."

"I thought you'd like to know I'm helping you." The former policeman sounded pleased with himself. "Early this morning I went around to the house of that Dr. Fox. I put a little fear into him, showed him my old department identification. How was he to know it's no longer valid? Anyway, I told him he better cooperate with you."

"Thanks, Al. But I'm not sure that was such a wise thing to do."

"Why not? He looked shook up."

"I can't talk about it. I'm coming to see you, are you home?"

At the door, Laura said, "What's the mysterious business with Al Ferrier?"

"He's getting involved in a betting thing and I'm trying to talk him out of it. I won't be long."

Metcalfe drove to the apartment building on Decelles Avenue. He went inside and hurried down the marble steps to the superintendant's apartment on the basement level. Reaching for the bell, he noticed the crack of the open door. A cold wind seemed to flow from the place, though when he stepped inside he discovered the apartment was stuffy and there was an unfamiliar musky smell in the air.

He stumbled over Ferrier's body in the kitchen. His throat had been cut and a lake of blood had collected at the low end of the uneven floor. Metcalfe stood over his friend for a full minute. Then he went upstairs and out of the building and drove to the nearest public telephone from which he placed an anonymous call to the police.

Throughout the whole procedure, Metcalfe now realized, he had been carrying the despatch case. He opened it on the car seat beside him and stared at the money. It seemed to be the only thing of value in his life, including the life itself. Because of him, Alphonse Ferrier was dead. Had he not involved him in his morbid investigation, Al would be alive.

But it was *not* morbid. His own Angela had made her way back into his life. There were many clues to her identity. Naturally, he had followed it up.

There seemed to be a message here for bereaved parents: don't go searching for your dead children—they may prove to be alive.

He switched on and drove to Maggie's address on Crescent Street. She was up in the loft, propped on her mattress with a bottle of

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chianti and a slab of cheese, watching a movie she'd seen four times. "It's a good thing I love you more than Robert Redford," she snarled, turning off the set and pouring her father some wine.

"Maggie, you have to do something for me. Hold onto your hat." He opened the case.

"New bills for the Sunday-afternoon Monopoly game," she said in a subdued tone.

"It's real. There's half a million there."

"When do the cops start firing through the windows?"

"I promise you, this is legal money. It's ours. You can smile if you want. You're the oldest unmarried daughter of a wealthy father."

"Where did you get it?"

"I can't tell you at the moment. It's a thing I've become involved in."

"You're in trouble."

"Not yet. But if it turns out that way, you'll have to take over. I want you to hire a safety-deposit box tomorrow and stow the money in it. Tonight, I want you to go and see your mother."

Maggie sensed what was coming. "Why can't you see her? Daddy, what's happening?" Her hands gripped his hard enough so he would have to struggle to free himself.

"I have to go away for a while. You know your mum—if I start to tell her this, there'll be a big scene. Believe me, Maggie, I'm doing the only thing I can."

Metcalfe stopped off at the office and collected Ferrier's gun. Then he drove to the building on Durocher where Tina Flanagan lived. He hadn't seen her since the night he dropped her off after the party. He felt he had to have a word with her though he had no idea what he would say.

Her name was hand-lettered on a card over the doorbell. Metcalfe's heart turned over as he studied the printing—it could have been done by Maggie or himself. He rang four times and was turning to go when a woman came out of a ground-floor apartment and smiled at him.

"The Flanagan girl? She's gone for a while. But she's keeping the place. She paid two months in advance."

Metcalfe drove up Decarie Boulevard, put the car on Highway 401, and aimed it at Toronto. He was halfway there when his mind began to emerge from the shock of discovering Al's body. It was almost midnight. At this rate, he would arrive in Flanagan's city

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in the small hours of the morning. He might better try to get some sleep.

Finding a motel with a vacancy sign, he checked in and lay between chilly sheets in a room that smelled of damp plaster and emulsion paint. What alternative did he have now that the mistakes had been made?

The first and worst one was to have let his imagination loose on the identity of Tina. Another drink and home early to bed that night could have saved all this. But he had taken her to eat, had watched her, listened to her, accepted the idle comment of a waitress who was simply being flattering. Crazy little accidents like that could make the world come to an end.

The other serious mistake was involving Al Ferrier, and then telling Flanagan he had an accomplice.

Al had, of course, contributed to his own fate by running to Dr. Fox and identifying himself.

Metcalfe turned over on sagging springs. If he did nothing, if he went home and pretended he had spent a night out drinking, would all end well? Never. Having killed Ferrier, Flanagan was committed now to doing away with the only man who could connect him with the crime.

No, he was doing the best thing, the only thing he could do. In his childhood, Metcalfe had listened to Foster Hewitt broadcasting NHL hockey from Toronto on the radio. One of the commentator's favorite clichés was, "The best defense is a good offense." This was what Metcalfe was doing—defending himself. By four o'clock, he was up and shaved and back on the road.

The current issue of *Locus* magazine supplied a photograph of the Flanagan mansion as well as an indication of its location. Metcalfe knew the city well enough to find the district. Then he cruised the early-morning streets until he came across the house, a colonial front set back behind an iron fence, trees, and a curving gravel road. The sleek grey limousine was parked opposite the entrance.

Driving half a block ahead, Metcalfe parked in a position where he could watch the front of the house. There was no point in going up and ringing the bell. A man in Flanagan's position would have layers of people between himself and the public. The time to make the move would be when he came out to get into the car. But it would have to be done quickly.

At eight o'clock, the chauffeur appeared from the side of the house and opened the limousine door by the driver's seat. He took a chamois

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and began polishing a fender. This was the warning Metcalfe needed. He left his car quietly and hurried to a position where he was hidden by a clump of shrubbery.

Footsteps on gravel. The chauffeur was approaching. Metcalfe's hand tightened on the gun in his pocket. A squeal of iron hinges as the man swung open the gates. Then retreating footsteps. Metcalfe's luck was holding. The rich man worked to a schedule and he was about to leave for the office.

Metcalfe peered between branches at the door of the house. The chauffeur was yawning, looking at his watch. The chamois was at the ready—like an old soldier, he wanted to be occupied when the colonel appeared.

The door opened, the chauffeur turned to his polishing, and Metcalfe darted from his place through the gateway and over thirty yards of cropped lawn. Horace Flanagan, splendid in a white suit and straw hat, saw the running man and saw the gun but only as Metcalfe raised it and aimed from a range of five yards.

"Just a minute," the millionaire said.

"It's all I can do!" Metcalfe called. The chauffeur was reaching inside his jacket but Metcalfe wasn't worried. He would have time for them both.

Then Tina Flanagan came through the open doorway. She saw Metcalfe and the gun. "What is it?" she said. "What are you doing here?"

Her eyes and Metcalfe's eyes came together. She was smiling, as if at a performance. Then she sensed something and her brow lowered, her mouth formed a silent question. In far less than a second, information flowed between them, not all the questions, not all the answers, but a flood of near-understanding, enough for her to work on for the rest of her life.

Metcalfe's gun wavered as the chauffeur's gun appeared. Flanagan observed the indecision on his assailant's face and called out to his bodyguard, but he was too late. The chauffeur fired twice and Metcalfe fell.

"Daddy, what's going on?" Tina cried, "I know him! He works in Montreal!"

"Don't go there, Tina. Come with me. Come inside."

"Why was he going to shoot you?"

"People do crazy things. Leave it, come inside."

Metcalfe had only seconds left for considering what had happened. He was not in pain. He was slipping into a condition that was not

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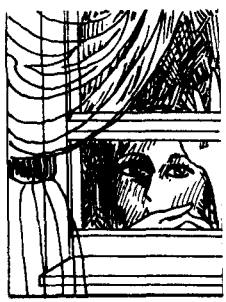
unpleasant. It was a good ending. Laura and Maggie would be well off. Laura's mother would be cared for properly. His own life was finished but it had to be, it was the only way. This was far better than if he had killed Flanagan and been left to cope with the aftermath.

The chauffeur was kneeling over him, observing him with neutral eyes. "The truth doesn't set you free," Metcalfe said, puzzling the man who had shot him. "You have to set yourself free."



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a *NEW* short story by

NEDRA TYRE

The maternal side of Angela's family had suffered many unusual deaths—from allergies, blood-poisoning, and worse. Very few had actually been the result of a crime. More the result of a lethal carelessness, a fatal inattention to significant details . . .

COLOR ME DEAD

by NEDRA TYRE

The wedding guests had left. The caterers had cleared away all the leftovers and had departed. The regular staff had crept exhausted to their own homes. The bride and bridegroom, Angela and Adam—in transports—were transporting themselves in their Cadillac to their honeymoon retreat high on Eagle Mountain. And the bride's great-great aunts, Samantha and Felicity, who had raised her since the deaths of her parents when she was only an infant, sat with their feet propped up and with large glasses of sherry in their right hands.

"Darling, you must admit it's strange," Felicity said.

"What, Precious?" Samantha answered dreamily.

"The way the maternal side of Angela's family dies in unusual ways—nothing ordinary like heart attacks or cancer."

"I guess I never stopped to think about it."

"Well, I don't know why not. That bee-sting of her Aunt Roseanne was totally improbable. A young bride walking out in the garden, admiring the roses, looking up into the eyes of her adoring bridegroom, a bee lands on her arm and she's done for. And her Cousin George—goosefeathers. The poor man, without knowing it, was allergic to goosefeathers and one afternoon in Austria after a heavy lunch and lots of beer, he took a nap, burrowed into a pillow, inhaled

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a goosefeather—and that was that. Her Aunt Hettie met her death trying on shoes. She was as proud as a peacock of her little feet—didn't mind that it meant she couldn't be fitted easily. Size three, quadruple A, she'd trill at shoe clerks and thrust her little foot forward, daring them to fit her. Then one day a clerk slipped a shoe on her foot and it had a tack or something in it. It pricked her big toe and she died of blood-poisoning."

Samantha was the agreeable sort and once a subject was introduced she liked to add her tidbit to show her amiability. "Well," she said, "come to think of it, that was a most unusual death her grandfather met—shot by young Tom Wynn, who thought he was paying too much attention to his twenty-year-old wife, and she to him. Joe Smith was eighty-four at the time. It's not every eighty-four-year-old man who can be considered a serious rival of a twenty-five-year-old man."

Felicity drained her sherry glass and poured another. "What got me started on death?" she asked.

Samantha, always reassuring, said, "Well, weddings, funerals—life, death—one brings to mind the other. That was such a sweet wedding this afternoon. Angela is such a darling girl. She never gave us a moment's worry. Nobody ever had a more appropriate name."

"She's been so affectionate and grateful—never seemed to mind a bit that she was raised by elderly aunts. Which brings me back to the odd deaths in her family. Her parents dying from those beets Aunt Lutie had canned. They ought to have had better sense than that. Lutie Jones was a dilettante in everything she tried and they knew it, but they didn't want to hurt her feelings by not eating them."

"Angela was just a baby at the time, otherwise no doubt she would have died, too. Just like her parents, she can't bear to hurt anybody's feelings. She'd have gobbled down those lethal beets as if they were spun sugar."

"Well, Precious, speaking of things that run in certain families, did it ever occur to you that it runs in Adam's family to marry money?"

"I don't think they do it purposely. It's just something that falls in their laps. You can't call them fortune-hunters because they've always had more money than anybody they've married. But, Felicity, does Adam have all his marbles? I mean, aren't a few buttons missing somewhere?"

"Samantha, what a thing to say."

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"Well, he stands around and nods his head as if he's eager to agree with you, but when it comes down to putting it actually into words he invariably comes out with some entirely irrelevant remark."

"I don't think that's a polite thing to say about someone who's been a member of the family only a few hours. Though I will grant Adam is a bit of a wool-gatherer."

"Darling, I don't give a hoot for his I.Q. His intelligence doesn't matter. He'll never have to earn a living. What's important is that he's everything Angela wants. They dote on each other."

"I've never seen a handsomer couple."

"It certainly was a sweet wedding." Samantha repeated what she had said earlier. But sweet was rather an odd adjective to describe a ceremony with 500 guests and a reception for 1,200.

"And Angela greeted the last person in the reception line with the same affection and enthusiasm as the first."

"I tell you, she's perfect—too good for this world. Did she ever lose her temper? Did she ever make any unreasonable demands? Does she have the slightest flaw?"

Felicity looked into the shallow depths of her glass, poured more wine into it, then said solemnly, "She's pickish when it comes to color."

Samantha was indignant. "She likes blue, that's all. Everybody has a favorite color. I'm crazy about green."

"Then why do you wear grey all the time?" Felicity asked. "No, Sister, Angela's feeling for color is more than just preference. She insists on particular shades—delicate pink, and green that's almost white, and yellow that has more beige than lemon in it."

"That's not what I had in mind when I referred to a flaw in Angela's character," Samantha said, her amiability fading fast.

"Surely that terrible and harrowing scene when Maudie Parresh wore that purple dress to tea hasn't slipped your mind."

"That's the first I've heard of Maudie Parresh's purple dress."

"Well, it must have happened the spring you took that conducted tour of Mexico and Guatemala. Anyway, Angela behaved like a little demon, clawing at Maudie and scratching and tearing at her. Maudie was a gentle and understanding person and forgave Angela at once, but there was nothing I could do to make Angela apologize. I barely had the strength to save Maudie herself from bodily harm."

"It probably didn't have a thing in the world to do with Maudie Parresh's purple dress," Samantha insisted, dismissing the subject.

The sisters yawned widely in each other's face and begged each

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other's pardon for the lapse. The day had been long and they hadn't exactly stinted themselves on the sherry for the last few hours.

"Now, dear," Samantha said, "I'm going to draw a bath for you and then I'll massage your neck and back and rub some nice lavender cologne on your temples."

Samantha had such a way with her hands she ought to have been a masseuse, Felicity thought when she climbed into bed and lay on her stomach and felt the magic of Samantha's probing fingers. She murmured little hums of satisfaction, and then said, "I hope our darling bride and her handsome bridegroom are having a lovely wedding night."

"I do too," Samantha said.

When Felicity had fallen asleep, Samantha went to her own room, undressed, and took a shower. While the spray danced soothingly on her tired shoulders, she thought of what Felicity had said about Maudie Parresh's purple dress. The sherry must have gone to Felicity's head—imagine Angela caring what color dress Maudie Parresh or anybody else wore. Samantha had never heard of anything as foolish in her life. Samantha's only misgiving about the entire match was that Adam was—well, dense.

In fairness to Samantha, it must be said that she was not the only one who considered Adam stupid. He hadn't done at all well in school. He had a tendency not to pay attention and seemed deliberately to misunderstand lesson assignments. He usually had to be told something several times before it finally sank in. But he was so friendly and so unassuming and so rich that no one really minded, and he was obviously capable of deep attachment.

He had been quite moved when he had met with Angela's attorneys and had learned the size of her fortune and that it was all to be left to him. In vain he pled in behalf of medical research, reforestation, endangered species, archaeological expeditions, ballet groups, symphony orchestras, and opera companies. Angela would have none of it. Everything she had must go to Adam. Adam wished that Angela were penniless. He wanted to give her everything. But she already had everything. He begged her to tell him something that she wanted. She insisted he was all her heart could desire.

They rarely talked. They were so befogged and befuddled and bedazzled by each other words were extraneous and unnecessary.

Yet one evening Angela had become very serious and had said that she must confess something to Adam. He was unusually tired.

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Their wedding day was approaching and he was working very hard redecorating the mountain retreat he had bought for their honeymoon cottage. He was somewhat bothered by Angela's insistence on making a confession. His conventional and straitlaced upbringing made him expect revelations of former lovers or illegitimate children or perhaps a fling or two at LSD. He was quite unprepared for her reference to purple. He had loosened their passionate grip long enough to push Angela slightly from him so that he could look into her eyes, and he had said with the vagueness which Samantha, his teachers, and other associates had often noticed, "That's all right, darling."

That night Adam had had difficulty, as he habitually did, in falling asleep after he had left Angela. But on that particular occasion it was not unrequited passion but puzzlement that gave him insomnia. What on earth had Angela meant by her reference to purple?

Purple. *Purple.* After hours of twisting on his bed in perplexity and bewilderment, he sat up.

Of course he knew what she meant.

The deliriously happy young couple were nearing their honeymoon cottage in the mountains—the bridegroom with his family trait of marrying fantastically rich young women and the bride from a line that on the maternal side tended to meet death in sudden and decidedly odd ways.

The cottage was perched on such a steep pinnacle of the mountain that Adam and Angela had to park some distance away. Adam grappled with four suitcases and Angela struggled with her makeup case and two shoe bags. They labored up the ascent as if they were struggling to conquer Mount Everest. The long months of endless parties, the crowds of guests they had greeted that afternoon, the hundreds of warm and lengthy thank-you letters for wedding presents which Angela had written and the long, debilitating hours that Adam had spent in getting the cottage ready caught up with them.

Adam mounted to the porch and watched helplessly while one of the bags tumbled back down the steps. He had no energy to retrieve it. The other three bags he shed at the front door. He wanted to pick Angela up so that he could carry her across the threshold, but his knees buckled, and Angela pushed him aside wearily and collapsed on the sofa near the entrance. He staggered across the living room to the couch that faced the fireplace.

The pleasure of their bodies had to give way to exhaustion.

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Instead of the heavy breathing of passion, the heavy breathing of deep sleep filled the honeymoon cottage.

Adam woke up.

It took him a moment to remember where he was and what had happened. He laughed wryly when he realized how their wedding night had been squandered. He pulled himself up and peered over at his darling Angela sleeping like a baby on the far sofa.

He got up and tiptoed past her into the bridal chamber he'd prepared for her. He undressed and went to the bathroom, where he took a long shower. Then he put on the robe his tailor had spent hours perfecting. He pulled the heavy draperies in the bedroom, but they blanketed too much of the light and he drew them back so that they were half opened.

Everything was ready.

A wedding morning could have the delirious joy of a wedding night.

He returned to the living room, gathered Angela tenderly into his arms, and took her into the bedroom and laid her carefully on the huge bed. She still slept. He stood above her and watched her breathe. He sat beside her a while and then walked to a window and looked out onto the bright, glorious morning. Unable to wait any longer, he called Angela's name. Without opening her eyes, she smiled and held out her arms.

He strode toward her, the folds of his robe swirling around him. But as Angela opened her eyes to welcome her beloved, the heavy drapery of purple undulating toward her made her cry out. She closed her eyes and turned her head for relief in another direction.

Walls of another hue of purple, less intense but even more threatening, bombarded her and she saw then that the color of the voluminous curtains matched the walls. She grasped at the bed and might as well have been lying on coals of fire as the deep purple of the satin sheets and spread seemed to sear her flesh. She saw the merciful opening in the curtains. If she could only keep her gaze on it and the mountain and the trees and the life-giving sunlight she might survive, but she was somehow mesmerized by the horrors around her. She saw that the chairs were upholstered in purple. She leaped out of bed and her feet touched the awful color of the carpet that ate like mollusks at her feet.

She began to scream. She was in a frenzy. Her bridegroom rushed

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toward her. Grabbing her to his heart, she was suffocated in an embrace of purple.

Samantha took the call and thanked fate that it was she and not Felicity who received Adam's summons. It was providential that he identified himself, otherwise she wouldn't have recognized his voice. The voice with its appalling news had an old man's quaver in it as it urged Samantha to drive immediately to Eagle Mountain and to bring Dr. Phillips, Angela's doctor, with her.

Adam was on the porch waiting for them as if he had done nothing but grip the balustrade from the time he had hung up the telephone. In his flowing purple robe he looked like someone at a masquerade.

For all of his distraught appearance, he was a proper host and opened the front door for them, then led them to the bedroom and the bed. In the surrounding purple, Adam in his purple robe seemed to disappear. The only thing not purple in the room was the frail and slender body of Angela, rigid upon the brocaded spread.

Though this was the beloved girl she and Felicity had raised, there had been too many deaths in Samantha's long life. Years ago she had learned that it was the living and the bereft who had to be ministered to at times of tragic loss, and she turned to embrace Adam.

"I don't know what happened to Angela," he said.

Dr. Phillips stooped professionally over Angela. "It looks like a heart attack," he said. "Of course, there'll have to be an autopsy."

Samantha glanced around the large room in amazement and Adam hurried to explain. "Angela loved purple," he said. "I did the bedroom in purple as a surprise."

"But, Adam, that's not true," Samantha said. "Felicity told me Angela hated purple."

Adam frowned from lack of comprehending. He bent down from his great height and cupped a hand around his right ear.

His young face, temporarily aged by grief, and that characteristic gesture of the old and deaf trying to snare the sound of speech made the tragedy understandable to Samantha.

Adam was not muddled and stupid as people had thought. The poor boy was somewhat deaf and his vagueness stemmed from that. No doubt Angela had confessed to him her loathing of purple. And Adam had thought she'd said, "I love purple."

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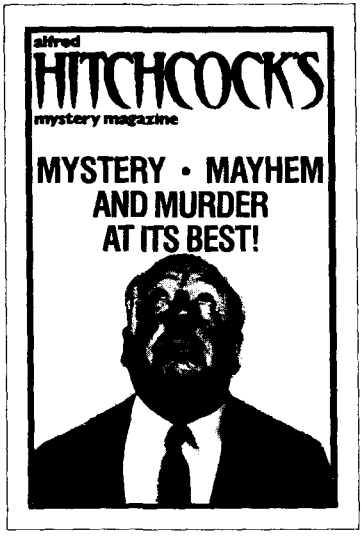
WATCH OUT!



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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

AWARDS TIME: The annual Edgar Awards of the Mystery Writers of America were presented at New York's Sheraton Centre Hotel on Friday, May 6th. The winners: best novel—Rick Boyer, *Billingsgate Shoal* (Houghton Mifflin); best first novel—Thomas Perry, *The Butcher's Boy* (Scribners); best paperback novel—Teri White, *Triangle* (Ace/Charter); best short story—Frederick Forsyth, "There Are No Snakes in Ireland," from his collection *No Comebacks* (Viking); best critical/biographical study—Roy Hoopes, *Cain* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston); best juvenile mystery—Robbie Branscum, *The Murder of Hound Dog Bates* (Viking).

MWA's coveted Grand Master Award went to Margaret Millar, and a special award in honor of Ellery Queen was presented by Eleanor Sullivan to the long-time collaborative team of Mary Jane Latsis and Martha Henissart, who write as Emma Lathen.

One night earlier, on Thursday, May 5th, the Crime Writers' Association of England presented its annual awards at London's Charing Cross Hotel. The winners: Gold Dagger—Peter Lovesey, *The False Inspector Dew* (Macmillan London; U.S. edition, Pantheon); Silver Dagger—S. T. Haymon, *Ritual Murder* (Constable; U.S. edition, St. Martin's Press); John Creasey Award (first novel)—Andrew Taylor, *Caroline Minuscule* (Gollancz); Nonfiction—John Cornwell, *Earth to Earth* (Allen Lane).

MAGAZINE UPDATE: The Canadian magazine *Black Cat* has ceased publication after six issues, but *Spiderweb* is still alive and well with a new editor, Ron Rouse. Subscriptions are $10.00 a year for four issues, from Spiderweb, Box F, MIT Branch Station, Cambridge, MA 02139.

A new magazine, really a tabloid newspaper, is the *Hyst'ry Myst'ry Magazine*. The title is a registered trademark, but the venture will hold more appeal for history buffs than for mystery fans. It contains investigations of true historical mysteries told in fictional form along the lines of *The Daughter of Time*, but without Josephine Tey's

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skill. Subscription for the quarterly is $12.00 for six issues, from Hyst'ry Myst'ry Magazine, Garnerville, NY 10923.

ARKHAM HOUSE: Collectors of horror and the supernatural will be interested in *Horrors and Unpleasantries* by Sheldon Jaffery (Bowling Green University Popular Press, $14.95 cloth, $7.95 paper), a bibliographic history and price guide to all 162 books published to date by Arkham House, the firm founded by the late August Derleth. Arkham's output included many collectors' items in the horror field, as well as some volumes of mystery short stories like Derleth's own Solar Pons series and Hodgson's *Carnacki, the Ghost-Finder.* The descriptive entries are interesting, though the book suffers somewhat from the lack of an index.

RELIGION AND MURDER: Harper Novels of Suspense, generally edited from the firm's New York office, are getting additional titles from the west coast this year. Harper & Row's San Francisco-based religious editor, Roy Carlisle, became interested in mysteries after attending last year's Bouchercon, and has purchased a first novel by Christopher Bryan, chaplain at the University of Exeter in England. *Night of the Wolf* ($10.95) combines detection with hints of Satanism, and is being published in May.

Carlisle says more mysteries will follow from the San Francisco office.

REVIVALS: A new British publisher, Zomba Books, is issuing a series of mystery omnibuses in hardcover and trade paperback. Called Black Box Thrillers, the series concentrates on American writers of the 1940s and 1950s. The first three titles, out in June, are: *The Jim Thompson Omnibus, The David Goodis Omnibus,* and *The Cornell Woolrich Omnibus.* Each book contains four novels, with Woolrich represented by *Waltz into Darkness, The Bride Wore Black, Phantom Lady,* and *The Black Curtain.*

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Due this summer from Scarecrow Press is *The Cold War File* by Andy East, a guide to espionage series of the 1960s, including James Bond-type thrillers, realistic spy novels, film novelizations, and sex-oriented spy mysteries.

Coming from Bowling Green University Popular Press later this year is surely the most bizarre mystery anthology on record. *The Defective Detectives,* edited by Ray B. Browne and Gary Hoppenstand, collects pulp stories about detectives with physical and mental abnormalities.

Looking ahead to 1984, Countryman Press will reissue the first four of Bill Pronzini's "Nameless" detective novels in trade paperback next spring. And Jacques Barzun & Wendell Hertig Taylor are enlarging their landmark volume *A Catalogue of Crime* for publication by Harper & Row in the fall of '84.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Although the recent death of Jack Webb did not go unnoticed by the media, he surely did not get all the tribute he deserved for his contributions to the mystery genre. He was an innovative pace-setter in radio, television, and feature film; all the cinematic forms of crime drama today owe him a debt.

In the early postwar years Webb was a radio performer in San Francisco who emigrated to Hollywood to be an actor in movies. On Frisco radio he had already developed his *noir* style as the star of a private-eye series, *Pat Novak, For Hire.* Webb's earliest Los Angeles job was to play the trouble-shooter hero of *Johnny Madero, Pier 23*—Madero rented boats but found the job dangerous on a weekly basis. Both radio shows shared the same breezy, hardboiled style, written by Richard Breen, who was to contribute much to the later *Dragnet.* Interestingly, both Novak and Madero were to be hounded by grim, tough cops: the former by the hated Inspector Hellman, played by Raymond Burr, and the latter by police lieutenant Warchek (William Conrad).

Webb quickly got work in the movies as well, playing featured roles in a number of films. One of them was *He Walked by Night* (1949), a realistic depiction of a police manhunt based on an actual case in which two cops were killed by a member of the fingerprint department—although in the transfer to screen the killer is made a deranged, clever civilian (Richard Basehart). Details of the track-down procedures, however, were to be as accurate as possible, and a police technical advisor was on the set. Webb, playing a lab technician, began talking to the policeman, and the idea for a realistic radio program about police work was born. The operation called "dragnet" was referred to at least three times during the film.

The impact of the radio *Dragnet,* in 1949, was enormous. Webb created programs of devastating realism, presenting police work in deglamorized, tedious detail ("We were working the day watch out of burglary . . ."), in which the listeners "travel step by step on the side of the law, through an actual case . . ." At the close of each program the announcer grimly relates how justice was meted out. But through each show the focus is always on Webb, Sergeant Joe Friday of the Los Angeles Police Department, as through his eyes (in our mind's eye) we sift evidence, interrogate endlessly, trace down every minute lead. "Just the facts, ma'am," Friday's flat-voiced probe directive, became a national catchphrase. *"The story you are about to hear is true. Only the names have been changed to protect the innocent."*

Joe Friday became a symbol

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(much as had Dick Tracy earlier) of the enlightened police figure, although Friday himself was a loner who lived with his mother. His cases were more dogged than heroic, far more real than the more recent, highly touted *Hill Street Blues*. Friday's narration sometimes tells us he has been working on a case for several months, or even almost a year. Naturally his superiors expect him to handle several cases at once. In one program, Friday and his partner pursue a suspect to a series of exasperating dead-ends only to discover finally two other cops have picked him up.

Three years after its debut, *Dragnet* was adapted with mood intact to television—although it would continue on radio until 1956. Webb's directorial eye was well suited to the new medium: the pacing, interrogational close-ups, and sense of dramatic urgency were perfection. Webb then tried his hand at a *Dragnet* feature, just widening the *modus operandi* of a murder investigation. There was another feature later, and the TV show was to last in production off and on until 1970. Throughout, Friday—plodding through cases large and small—lost none of his humanity, nor sheathed his terse comments on the urban condition. "Look at her," pleads a man Friday has just arrested for battering his drunken, slattern wife, "can you blame me?" Friday's deadpan retort: "Can you blame *her?*"

Webb also created for all three mediums (radio, television, and films) the superb *Pete Kelly's Blues,* about a musician playing the crime-ridden New Orleans jazz clubs of the Twenties. After *Dragnet,* he was to create other law-enforcement docudramas for television, but it is for *Dragnet*—the first authentic police drama on radio *and* television—that he will be long remembered. The show is still on reruns today. When Jack Webb died earlier this year, Joe Friday's badge number—714—was retired by the Los Angeles Police Department as a tribute.

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INTERVIEW: NEDRA TYRE (2)

This is the conclusion of an interview that began in the previous issue.

EQMN: You've said you find life ridiculous and confusing. Is this something you've felt from an early age or is it a result of your experience in social work, perhaps?

TYRE: I don't know when or where I said that, but I feel it very deeply. It didn't occur when I was a child or young person—I was too earnest then.

EQMN: In spite of this pessimistic view of life, your writing, especially your delightfully humorous writing, is neither bitter nor black. How come?

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TYRE: Just a minute, love. I don't think I'm pessimistic. What I think I am is a realist. I feel like Alice. You know she was a no-nonsense child, behaving very logically, and it was all those people and animals and objects around her who acted oddly and grotesquely. I'm pleased—I'm flattered—by what you said about my humor. The first piece I ever had published was humorous. It was called "Wild Bosses I Have Known." If I were to bring it up to date how many, many names I would have to add.

EQMN: Are you religious?

TYRE: I don't think so. Perhaps I should get credit of a sort for all those years of going to Sunday School and church and morning chapel at school—not that attending services makes one religious. I try to be ethical. God help us, I'm rather Victorian and more than a little prissy. What I am is awestruck. How did everything begin? How does it stay together? How did people figure out how to plant and harvest grain and where did the grain come from in the first place? How did the hundreds—thousands?—of languages and dialects develop? Such questions make my head swim. In fact, if I dwelt on how awestruck I am I wouldn't be able to put one foot in front of the other.

EQMN: Hall of Death, published in hardcover by Simon & Schuster in 1960 and in paperback as *Reformatory Girls* by Ace two years later, certainly gives a reader pause. Did you research at a girls' reformatory? Had you worked with girls in trouble?

TYRE: Hall of Death was made up out of whole cloth. I'd never seen a reformatory or worked with girls in trouble. I didn't do any research.

EQMN: You have a special understanding of the elderly and of young people. Do they share a special place in your affections?

TYRE: That's nice of you to say, but I don't feel that I have any special rapport with any group of people, especially in relation to their ages.

EQMN: A young ship's doctor in a story we recently published by Margaret Yorke likes old ladies. He thinks they "were often valiant, building walls of reserve around themselves as a defense against pity. Mrs. Ford, he saw, was one like that. There were others who thought great age allowed them license to be rude, and took it, and the doctor liked them too for he admired their spirit."

TYRE: I like those observations—how well written they are. But actually I don't believe that people change. I think the little girl becomes the elderly woman with only the slightest—if that—modification in personality. I think that Agatha Christie via Miss Marple (don't tell me it was Poirot!) was right when she said the tragedy of life is that people do not change.

EQMN: How much of a role do you think peole play in causing their own and each other's misery?

TYRE: I think we play a great deal in causing our own misery and the misery around us, but I don't have the slightest suggestion as to how we can help each other. In fact,

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when I think how divisive and self-centered most of us are I think that things bumble along fairly well.

EQMN: Would you want to comment on the deafness you've suffered since October 1976 and how it has affected your life?

TYRE: For a long time I thought the doctor who told me I'd be totally deaf within five years had made the wrong diagnosis. I'd always had remarkable hearing. And as the years passed nothing happened. I certainly wasn't totally deaf in five years or in ten or in fifteen, but after that there was a diminution. Then one ear went deaf and some time later the other. I'd had, let's see, twenty-two years' warning, so it was hardly a surprise. But it was a nuisance—no music, no movies, no plays. However, their lack hasn't really bothered me. There's more time to read and go to art galleries.

What is troublesome is not being able to answer someone's question about a direction or exchange a few words with a bus driver or a clerk at a checkout counter. And of course I can't use the telephone. It's truly amazing how much is transacted by phone. People's reactions when I say I'm deaf are varied. Some are sympathetic and some are impatient and start screaming—with the idea, I suppose, that they can make me hear.

But what is most mystifying to me is what it is people are talking about when they talk to each other—all those incessantly moving lips. Where can they find subject matter for endless conversation? They never shut up. Everyone yaks all the time. And not so very long ago I was among them, yakking my head off with the best of them.

I'm lucky because I have a job where I don't need to hear. It could be tragic to be deaf if you had to communicate at work. It's certainly not tragic for me. In fact, deafness is often quite interesting. And it can be convenient—I don't care one small damn how noisy my neighbors are.

Now if we only had time for me to tell you about my arthritis and allergies!

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Most mystery and detective novels depict the system of criminal justice not as it is but as we would like it to be. Few neat puzzles, amply clued and neatly solved, appear in real life, and many more investigations are ended by the help of informants than by detection as practiced by Sherlock Holmes or Ellery Queen. While some semblance of justice is no doubt done in a majority of cases, it is seldom if ever perfect. However, I would not want most writers of mystery fiction to try to reflect reality with absolute or even approximate ac-

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curacy. Only a writer of unusual talent can do that and still produce satisfactory fiction. The pseudonymous K.C. Constantine is such a writer.

***** K.C. Constantine: *Always a Body To Trade,* David R. Godine, $12.95. The underpublicized creator of Rocksburg, Pennsylvania, police chief Mario Balzic is one of the three or four best American crime writers currently active. His dialogue reflects the uncanny ear of a fine dramatist, and his characters jump off the page. In this case, involving drug traffic and the murder of an unidentified woman, Balzic must teach his town's naive and idealistic new mayor what police work is really like. Balzic shows how a man can coexist with depravity beyond most imaginations, making what deals need to be made, and remain a fundamentally decent, even vulnerable man. He is one of mystery fiction's great characters.

**** Julian Symons: *The Tigers of Subtopia and Other Stories,* Viking, $14.75.

*** Julian Symons: *The Detling Secret,* Viking, $14.75. Here are two new books, published on the same day, by the 1982 winner of the Mystery Writers of America's Grand Master Award. They show Symons equally at home in the long and short forms of the mystery. The collection gathers eleven beautifully written and cunningly constructed contemporary tales, of which all but one ("The Last Time") have appeared in *EQMM.* Four are repeated from Symons' EQ-edited collection, *How To Trap a Crook* (1977). The novel, continuing in the Victorian setting of his previous two, involves murder in the world of the British upper crust, with sidelights on business, politics, and the bohemian art scene. Though not among his very best, it exhibits strong craftsmanship and a fine ironical sense of period.

*** Jan Ekstrom: *Deadly Reunion,* Scribners, $12.95. The first American appearance of an outstanding Swedish mystery writer is a novel as true to the conventions of the Golden Age as any in recent memory. We have a wealthy elderly spinster gathering her covetous heirs, speculation over the contents of her will, and a locked-room murder, all successfully played with an absolutely straight face. Singing police detective Bertil Durell is a likeable hero, and Ekstrom keeps a large cast (family tree included) and an enormously complicated plot in control. Both the locked-room solution and the climactic stunt are expertly done and cause me to look forward to more from this author. Joan Tate's translation passes the big test: it doesn't read like one.

*** Colin Watson: *Whatever's Been Going On at Mumblesby?,* Doubleday/Crime Club, $11.95. The latest case for Flaxborough's Inspector Purbright involves the death of a little-loved village solicitor, whose common-law widow someone locks in her bathroom the day of the funeral. Other odd occurrences follow, allowing plenty of opportunity to amuse for series regulars like Chief Constable Chubb and Miss Teatime. Watson

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stands with Donald E. Westlake, Phoebe Atwood Taylor, Joyce Porter, and a very few others in the first rank of humorous mystery writers.

*** Marcia Muller: *The Cheshire Cat's Eye,* St. Martin's, $10.95. The third book about Sharon McCone, investigator for San Francisco's All Souls Legal Cooperative, is a smoothly written, fairly clued pure whodunit with an interesting background of Victorian house restoration.

** Ralph McInerny: *A Loss of Patients,* Vanguard, $9.95. Father Roger Dowling of Fox River, Illinois, matches wits with a malevolent dentist in his seventh case. There is some good writing here and some effective quiet humor, but ultimately the book illustrates what a difficult form the inverted detective story is. In most cases, certainly in this one, more mystery would help.

** Robert B. Parker: *The Widening Gyre,* Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, $13.95. Boston private eye Spenser, attainer of one of the highest wisecrack-per-utterance ratios in all shamusdom, becomes chief of security for a right-wing Senate candidate.

Strengths (as usual): dialogue (except for the pop-psych speechifying between Spenser and some of the continuing characters), descriptive passages, general readability. Weaknesses (also as usual): thin plot, pretentiousness, superficiality (especially when compared to writers like Chandler and Ross Macdonald).

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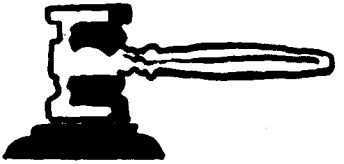

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DETECTIVERSE

MORE GRAVE TONES

by JAMES HOLDING

These are the bones of Sidney Kidd,
Known to his friends as Safe Door Sid
Because no safe was locked so tight
But Sid could crack it with gelignite.
His trade was of an explosive ilk
But his speech was gentle and mild as milk.
Obscenities never passed his lips,
Profanity never marked his slips.
A "gee!" or "darn!" was more his way
Of expressing anger, surprise, dismay—
Until one night, while drilling the door
Of a safe in a well known jewelry store,
A rookie cop by some odd quirk
Detected Sidney at his work.
He shouted a challenge, drew his gun,
And Sidney, startled, crouched and spun.
And when he saw his hopeless plight,
He swore his strongest oath in fright.
"Oh, shoot!" exclaimed disgruntled Sid.
And that's just what the rookie did.

This somber slab conceals the bones
Of Agnes (Mrs. Nathan) Jones,
Killed in a most unseemly fashion
By Nathan Jones in a fit of passion.
Agnes, trapped in the web Fate spins,
Wed one of a pair of identical twins
And never was able to get it straight
Which twin was Bill and which was Nate.

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a *NEW* short story by

EDWARD WELLEN

Sergeant Kelsey had come to the office-building in response to a 10-31 and he needed all the backup he could get. Enter Officer Dugdale from the Fifty-ninth . . . A playful, entertaining puzzle story full of sly hints and fair play, from the clever, busy typewriter of Edward Wellen . . .

THE MAN FROM THE FIFTY-NINTH

by EDWARD WELLEN

"Damn," said Steve Arkwright, cutting his throat with a finger to signal a halt. "Always damn sirens in this damn town."

"It's just as well," Dru Wodryn said. "I wasn't really ready anyway. I don't feel it."

"He doesn't feel it," Steve said tonelessly.

"That's right. Something's missing. I still need a bit more of I don't know what if I'm going to pull it off. This has got to be one hundred percent authentic." He brushed past Steve and leaned into the van of sound equipment. He switched on a shortwave receiver and tuned into the police frequency in time to catch "Green Five responding to that ten-thirty-one."

"Whatever that is," Steve muttered.

Dru waved him to silence and then his eyes brightened, his ears questing after the nearby siren. "It sounds like it's just around the corner." He was already moving toward it. "It's too good to pass up."

"Hey, man—you can't just take off like that!"

"Hold the fort. I'll be back in a minute."

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Steve had to project his voice. "You realize how much your minute is going to cost?"

"It'll be worth it," Dru tossed back over his shoulder.

It might have sounded like just around the corner but it was around two corners. It looked like a big response to a big squeal, the flashing red lights of three squad-cars warning all civilians away from shoals of dusk. Dru was just in time to see the last of the radio-car cops vanish into the tall and mostly dark office-building on the northwest corner. Another police car pulled up then, a sergeant at the wheel.

Eyes busy with the world, the sergeant switched off the engine and drew out the key. He picked up his cap from the seat beside him and put it on as he squeezed out of the car. Dru instinctively took a step backward. The sergeant spotted him. "Hey, you!"

Dru froze. "Me?"

The sergeant threw Dru a flicker of vague recognition, though when his eyes shot to the precinct insignia and the name-tag on Dru's chest there was a slight and fleeting frown. "Yeah, you. Dugdale. You're with the Fifty-ninth? What are you doing here?" His eyes roved restlessly, taking in the surround.

Dru's eyes clutched at the sergeant's name-tag. "Sergeant Kelsey, I'm—"

"Never mind who you are. I can use all the backup I can get. We're investigating—" His restless eyes picked up on something and he interrupted himself. "What's this? A ten-thirty-seven?"

Dru looked blank.

Kelsey grimaced. "Didn't you notice? Two guys in a Chevy parked across the street. Don't look now."

"Oh."

Sergeant Kelsey reached into his car, picked up the mike, and called base. "Give us ten-twenty-eight on New York 789-90M." While he waited, he eyed Dru's shoulder holster.

"If I have to brace those guys, Dugdale, I want you to cover me."

Dru gulped. "But listen, Sergeant—"

Kelsey put a hand up to halt verbal traffic. Base was crackling back with the vehicle-registration information he had asked for.

"That's a Justice Department motor-pool license-number."

Kelsey made a face but kept the sourness out of his voice. "Ten-four." He switched off and hung the mike back in place. "Looks like

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there won't be any shootout, Dugdale—at least not with those two. Stay here while I see if they spotted anything that might help us."

Dru studied Kelsey as the sergeant, not relaxing vigilance one whit, approached the driver of the Chevrolet. The window rolled down. Dru watched the two occupants flash IDs. Kelsey spoke with them for a moment.

He walked back stiffly, heightened color in his face. "Feds, all right. Arrogant punks. All they care about is not getting blown. They're on a stakeout, surveilling somebody in the apartment-building. Politely told me to buzz off. They didn't see a thing—so they say. Makes you wonder sometimes whose side they're on." He shook his head, then his darting eyes fixed on one of the squad-cars. He strode to the driver's side, reached in through the open window, and snatched the key from the dashboard. He gave a one-sided smile as he pocketed the key. "Teach French a lesson. He left the ignition key in, against regulations never mind common sense." Then, right hand ready to his holster, he made briskly for the office-building entrance. "Let's go, Dugdale."

Dru Wodryn hesitated.

Kelsey swung his left hand in a hooking motion. "Come along. I'll make it right with your commander. We're shorthanded and that's a good-sized building my people are trying to cover."

Drawing a deep breath, Dru touched his cap in a one-finger salute and fell in behind Kelsey. "What's the beef, Sergeant?"

"The complaint, Dugdale, is a possible burglary in progress."

Dru nodded. "Oh. A ten-thirty-one."

Kelsey's head jerked around. He eyed Dru quizzically. "Yeah, a ten-thirty-one," he said drily. His gaze shot past Dru.

Following Kelsey's gaze, Dru saw the two Feds scrunch down in their stakeout car as a woman clicked down the apartment-house steps and along the sidewalk in tow of a pooch. She paused momentarily to stare at the flashing squad-cars, then let the impatient poodle tug her on its sniffing way. One of the men got out after the woman had passed. He tailed her on foot while the other sat glaring at Kelsey and the blocking squad-cars.

Kelsey frowned. "Something bothers me about that dame," he muttered. Then with a shrug he turned back to the task at hand.

Dru followed him into the office-building.

The lobby stood empty, but the whir of one of the three elevators drew their eyes to the pointer of its controlled fall.

9—8—7—6—5—4—3—2—

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Kelsey moved to the right of the elevator door and waved Dru to the left of it.

1.

The door opened on a cop and an elderly but hefty civilian. The cop had a grip on the man.

"You got the guy, French?" Kelsey shook his head and corrected himself before French could answer. "No, this would be the night watchman." And Dru saw that the cop wasn't subduing the man but supporting him, and that the civilian wasn't entirely a civilian but was missing a uniform cap.

Pale and shaken, but holding himself together, the man straightened. "Pawley's the name. I used to be on the force myself."

Kelsey looked everywhere but at Pawley, not wanting, it seemed, to look too many years ahead, not wanting to see himself mirrored in that flesh. "Are you the one who called in?"

"That's right—after I came to and worked loose from the venetian-blinds cord the guy cut and tied me with."

"How'd it happen?"

Pawley glanced at the wall clock, which said eight o'clock and change. "It was about half an hour ago. I was making my rounds. Everything seemed normal, nothing out of the way, until, beginning with the seventh floor—705, to be exact—I spotted some offices that should be dark light and doors that should be locked open. The guy must've hidden in one of the washrooms or on the fire stairs until he thought everyone went home. Anyway, I found just that one office on the seventh broken into, but when I went to the eighth I found, let's see—" he winced with the pain of thinking "—801, 802, 804, and 805 broken into. On the ninth, it was 901, 904, and 905. That's when I figured I better call in.

"But then, that's when I surprised him—" Pawley touched a lump on his head gingerly and winced again "—or the other way around. I was just going to use the phone in 905 to call you fellows when I heard these footsteps behind me—but I heard them too late. He slugged me before I got turned all the way around."

"Did you get any kind of look at him? See whether he carried any loot?"

Pawley shook his head—and winced again. "Sorry. About all I can say for sure is a male Caucasian blur."

"Okay." Kelsey looked him over. "French, see that Mr. Pawley gets to a hospital."

"I'm all right," Pawley said.

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"Hospital, French."

"Yes, Sarge." French urged Pawley toward the entrance.

"How are you guys handling it, French?"

"Oh. Miller and Lamm are covering the basement and the fire stairs, me and Schultz were taking the ground floor to the tenth—Schultz is up on ten now—and Avery and Lucchese are checking out the twentieth to the tenth."

"Sounds okay." Kelsey let French walk Pawley as far as the entrance before he spoke again. "Hold it a second, French." Kelsey dug into a pocket. "You might need this."

He tossed, and French caught, the ignition key to French's squad-car. French's jaw dropped, then he flushed. He hurried Pawley out.

Kelsey sighed. "Looks like a lost cause, Dugdale, but we got to go through the motions. The perpetrator's long gone, but we'll help search the building."

"How long will that take, Sergeant?"

Kelsey eyed him coldly. "It'll take as long as it'll take, Dugdale. I don't know how it is in the Fifty-ninth, and I don't care, but there's no cooping and no ducking overtime in the Twenty-third."

"Yes, Sergeant." Dru could always drift away, disappear.

Something about Dru's ready acquiescence, or about Dru himself, bothered Kelsey. But he shook off whatever it was that troubled him about his commandeered cop and went to work. He produced three wedge-shaped devices. Two he used to immobilize two elevators, the third he put in place to keep the door to the fire stairs from opening.

"The fire commissioner would have my hide if he knew, but he doesn't have to know. Now nobody can get out this way. We'll use the one elevator and prop its door open when we're searching a floor. Okay, Dugdale, come aboard."

They stopped at the tenth floor where Schultz reported four offices were lighted and empty—1001, 1002, 1004, and 1005. Kelsey instructed him to stand watch and then steered Dru back into the elevator. "We'll take it from the top," he said, pressing buttons.

As they expressed to the twentieth floor, Kelsey kept his eyes busy, directly and in the corner mirror. Dru sought to distract him. "You trust the watchman, Sergeant?"

"Pawley? I don't believe he gave himself that bump, if that's what you mean."

"He might, if he wanted to play the part convincingly."

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"Look, Dugdale, this is no great drama. What this is is a sneak-thief thing. Don't build it up out of proportion, don't make it more than it is."

"I guess so, Sergeant."

"You guess so." The elevator stopped at the twentieth floor and the door opened, but Kelsey put an arm out to hold Dru back. "No wrong moves now. I don't want cops shooting cops." He raised his voice. "This is Sergeant Kelsey coming out, with another officer."

He poked his head out. "Nobody. Okay, we'll elevate down a floor at a time until we catch up with our people."

They caught up with two of Kelsey's people on the twelfth floor. One of the cops was waiting for them as they got off the elevator.

"Glad you're not jumpy, Lucchese."

"I was expecting you, Sarge. I heard you calling out a couple of floors higher—you know, through the shaft." Lucchese stared curiously at Dru.

"Where's Avery?"

"In 1203, with a victim."

"Not a homicide!"

"No—just slugged and tied up."

"Next time don't scare me like that, Lucchese. Okay, let's go see. Tell me about it on the way."

"Me and Avery worked our way down but didn't find anything wrong until we hit this floor. We found four offices broken into and all lit up, but nobody there. Then we heard this thumping noise coming from 1203 and we eased in and switched on the light and found a guy on the floor, gagged and tied up. We untied him and got him into a chair. Here he is."

Avery was tending the victim, holding a paper cup of water to the man's gray lips. Lengths of newly cut cord lay on the carpeted floor. Same M.O., Dru noted: lump on the noggin and venetian-blinds cord. It seemed heavy for a sneak-thief caper, Lucchese suggested.

Kelsey, his eyes darting around at drafting tables and rolls of plans, appeared to think so, too. "Has the man been able to tell you what's missing?"

The man spoke for himself. "I'm Harvey Brehmer, Officer. I'm an architect. I was working late and someone came in and knocked me out. When I came to, the lights were out and I was tied up. As far as I can tell, nothing seems to be missing."

"Okay, Mr. Brehmer, thanks. Avery, take Mr. Brehmer down. You

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might catch French, who's driving the night watchman to a hospital. Otherwise, get Mr. Brehmer there yourself."

"Right, Sarge."

Avery and Lucchese helped Brehmer to the elevator.

"Send it back up!" Kelsey called.

"You got it, Sarge!"

"I wish I had," Kelsey muttered to himself. He grunted as he bent to pick up a length of cord. He studied the cut ends, stuffed the cord into an evidence envelope, and stowed the envelope in a pocket. He caught Dru watching him and smiled one-sidedly. "If we catch the perpetrator, and if we find a knife on him, we might match the blade to the cuts. It's a long chance, I know, but what else have we got to go on in this crazy case?"

Dru nodded.

Kelsey's eyes darted around the office. Without looking at Dru, he said sharply, "Well, Dugdale?"

"Well what, Sergeant?"

"You think Brehmer is putting on an act?"

Dru reddened. "No, Sergeant."

Kelsey faced him and nodded. "I don't think so, either." He turned on his heel and took a walk out in the corridor. When he came back he said, "Lights on in two offices on both sides of this one. No one in any of the four offices. What's going on?"

He paced the office and after a moment Dru reached for a clean sheet of graph paper. Kelsey's restless eyes collared him. "What do you think you're doing, Dugdale?"

"Sergeant, I have a glimmer of an idea what the prowler was after."

"I'm anxious to know what it is, Dugdale, because as far as I've been able to tell, the prowler didn't get away with a thing."

"He did steal something, Sergeant."

"Yeah? And what might that be?"

"He took away the light."

Kelsey stared at Dru, then waved toward the bright fluorescents, a gesture God might have given at the beginning of Genesis. "What are you talking about, Dugdale? The bulbs, the fixtures, they're right here."

"Look, Sergeant, didn't Lucchese say he and Avery heard thumping and found the architect here in the dark?"

"So?"

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"So what kind of prowler goes around lighting up dark offices and blacking out lit ones? What's the guy after?"

Kelsey's eyes rested on Dru's face. "Suppose you tell me."

Dru gave it two beats before he answered. "You know how it is at Chistmas?"

"First lights, now Christmas. Christmas-tree lights?"

"*Windows,* Sergeant. Windows in a large office-building, when they're lit at Christmastime—Easter, too, come to think of it—to form a big cross."

"You think that's what this is all about—some religious nut making a cross of light? That's crazy. It isn't anywhere near Christmas—*or* Easter."

"Not a cross, Sergeant. But something. That's why I swiped this sheet of graph paper. If we mark a box for each lit window, we'll see just what."

Kelsey took several beats of his own. "I don't know, Dugdale. We can't spare this thing much more time." His face darkened. "You know, maybe that's all this is, a ploy to tie half the precinct up while the boys are pulling some big job a few blocks away."

Dru shook his head. "I'll bet I'm right, Sergeant."

"Easy for you, Dugdale. It's my shield you're betting." He looked at Dru. "What makes you so sure?"

Dru stepped to a window and gazed out across at the apartment-building. He pointed to it. Kelsey joined him.

"The Feds are staking out that apartment-building, true? If they're watching and tailing somebody—"

"The dame with the dog."

"If they're surveilling her, they're also bugging the apartment, tapping the phone, shortstopping the mail, screening visitors. Am I right?"

Kelsey pursed his mouth and nodded.

"Well, then, Sergeant, all that happened here took place as a way of getting a message through to her without alerting the Feds."

Kelsey's gaze shot to the graph paper in Dru's hand. "And you figure if we fill in the right boxes we can spell the message out?"

"Now you got it, Sergeant." Dru paused. "The only floor I don't have a picture of is eleven."

"You get to work," Kelsey said. "I hear the elevator coming back up. I'll go check it out."

"And, Sergeant?" Dru said. "Maybe you could get the men covering the basement and fire stairs to help you check out all the lit offices

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on floors seven through twelve, see where the blinds are open or closed on all the windows."

Kelsey gave him a hard look and left.

"You're making me a believer," Kelsey said after 705, 901, 904, 1004, 1101, and 1104 showed them the same pattern of left-hand windows with the blinds open and 1005 and 1105 with the right-hand blinds open. All the other lighted offices had both blinds open.

When Dru had recorded the last of the lighted offices, Kelsey said, "Well, how does she read?"

Dru showed him the graph.

Kelsey frowned. He straightened suddenly. "Could it be a political plot involving the *QEII*? She's in town now."

"It isn't QE," Dru reminded him, "it's EQ."

	01	02	03	04	05
12	X X X X			X X X X	
11	X			X	X
10	X X X X			X	X
9	X			X	X X
8	X X X X			X X X X	
7					X

Kelsey clearly liked his own interpretation and showed his reluctance to abandon it. "Maybe the guy got mixed up, put the letters backward, forgot that they were supposed to be read from the outside."

Dru spoke firmly. "Uh uh—if he was that mixed up, the letters themselves would be facing inward."

Kelsey grimaced. "So they would. Okay. EQ it is. But that still doesn't tell us what EQ means." He smiled at a thought. "When I was studying for sergeant, I disremember if it was in the test itself or in the study material, but I came across EQ. Educational Quo-

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tient, I think it stood for." His gaze shot to Dru's face. "Something sting you?"

"Sergeant, I have a good idea what this EQ means."

"Then let's hear it, Dugdale. You sound sorta stagey, like you're trying to build suspense or win applause or something."

Dru's face burned. "Sorry, Sergeant." He spoke straightforwardly. "I think EQ stands for Ellery Queen."

"The mystery writer?"

"And the magazine."

"You mean this is all a publicity stunt?" Kelsey swelled to the point of bursting his blue. "By God, if that's the case, I'll nail EQ's hide—and the publisher's."

"No publicity stunt, Sergeant. It's a co-conspirator's way of telling the woman in the apartment-house across the way—right over the heads of the Feds—to pick up a copy of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* because he's stuck a message inside it. That's probably why she went out for a walk with her dog. Most likely she went to a nearby newsstand and bought the bottommost copy of *EQMM*."

Kelsey's face shone with delight. "Right under their noses." He rubbed his palms together. "We'll watch them eat crow when we hand it to them on a platter. Let's go, Dugdale."

They encountered Lucchese in the lobby. Kelsey told him to go back on patrol and to tell the others to do the same. Lucchese nodded, with a puzzled glance at Dru. Kelsey swept up the wedges and led Dru to the entrance. His gaze darted up and down the street. He clapped a hand on Dru's shoulder, and for one scary instant Dru felt himself under arrest, but Kelsey was pointing him at the Feds' stakeout car.

"You do the honors, Dugdale. I see the dame heading back from walking her dog. And there's her tail. Get to the driver before she reaches her building. Tell the driver she'll be carrying a message in a copy of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* she'll have on her."

Dru strode swiftly to the driver and spoke with precision and authority. The startled Fed got his mind into gear and stepped quickly out to confront the approaching woman.

Kelsey joined Dru. "What did he say?"

"If our guess is good and she's carrying a copy of the magazine, he's going to stop her and search her."

They watched the agent stop the woman, confiscate a digest-sized

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magazine in her purse, and give his bewildered partner a gesture to wait for a later fill-in.

"Good work, Dugdale," Kelsey said. "I'm going to put your name in for a commendation. Who's your commander?"

Dru went blank for the moment. Then he smiled in embarrassment. "You won't believe this, Sergeant Kelsey, but for a while there I really believed I was Officer Dugdale. I'm not a cop."

Kelsey stared. "You're not—" He began to swell with anger, then collapsed with an explosive laugh as recognition dawned. "Damn, I knew I knew you! Dugdale, hell! You're Dru Wodryn. I've seen you dozens of times, I've seen your name in lights. —Lights! I'll bet that's what made you think of a message in lights!"

"Could be, Sergeant. Nice meeting you. I gotta get back. We're shooting."

"Shooting?" Kelsey's gaze shot to Dru's holster. His face had the look of an unvoiced uh-oh. "You were backing me up with blanks?"

Dru nodded sheepishly.

"Get out of here, Wodryn," Kelsey said. Then he grinned and stuck out his hand. "And thanks."

Steve Arkwright made a big business of looking at his watch as Dru reappeared. "Are we ready now? I hope it was worth it."

Dru nodded. "It was. Now I know how to play it." He consciously imitated Kelsey. "A cop's eyes keep moving—taking everything in. See, even while I'm talking to you I'm looking past you, past the camera crew, and I'm noticing the abandoned buildings down the street, and I'm wondering why would a guy carrying a jerrican start up a stoop, then spot me and spin around and head back the way he came—"

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a *NEW* short story by

SIMON BRETT

first publication in the U.S.

As soon as he saw Peter Mostyn, Larry knew it was a bad idea. He felt like Dorian Gray meeting his picture face to face. The Little Boy had aged so unattractively that his appearance was a challenge to Larry's vigour and smartness. After all, they were about the same age—no, hell, Mostyn was younger. At school he had been the Little Boy to Larry's Big Boy. A couple of forms behind, so a couple of years younger . . . Larry Renshaw hated the past and didn't like to think about it. Peter Mostyn had frozen like an insect in the amber of adolescence.

A gripping, grim story from Simon Brett, praised by Richard Schickel in Time *magazine for his honest work, his solid entertainment, and his* farceur*'s eye for geniuses unsung by anyone but themselves . . .*

BIG BOY, LITTLE BOY

by SIMON BRETT

Under normal circumstances he would have thrown away the letter as soon as he recognized the cramped handwriting, but Larry Renshaw was in the process of murdering his wife and needed to focus his mind on something else. So he read it.

Mario, the barman, had handed it over. Having a variety of postal addresses in pubs and bars all over London was a habit Larry had developed in less opulent days, and one that he had not attempted to break after his marriage to Lydia. The sort of letters he received

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had changed, though; there were fewer instructions from "business associates," fewer guilty wads of notes buying other people's extra-marital secrets. Their place had been taken by confirmations of his own sexual assignations, correspondence that could, by the widest distension of the category, be classed as love letters. Marriage had not meant an end of secrets.

But it had meant an upgrading of some of the "postes restantes." Gaston's Bar in Albemarle Street was a definite advance on the Stag's Head in Kilburn. And the Savile Row suit, from which he flicked the salt shed by Mario's peanuts, was more elegant than a hotel porter's uniform. The gold identity bracelet that clinked reassuringly on his wrist was more comfortable than a handcuff—and, Larry Renshaw sincerely believed, much more his natural style.

Which was why he had to ensure that he continued to live in that style. He was nearly fifty. He resented the injustices of a world which had kept him so long from his natural milieu, and now that he had finally arrived there he had no intentions of leaving.

Nor was he going to limit his lifestyle by removing those elements—other women—of which Lydia disapproved.

Which was why, while he sipped Campari and vodka in Gaston's Bar, he was murdering his wife.

And why he read Peter Mostyn's letter to take his mind off what he was doing.

"—and those feelings for you haven't changed. I know over thirty years have passed, but those nights we spent together are still the memories I most treasure. I have never had any other *friends*. Nothing that has happened and no one I have met since has meant as much to me as the pleasure I got, not only from being with you, but also from being known as *yours*, from being made fun of at school as your Little Boy.

"I know it didn't mean as much to you, but I flatter myself that you felt *something* for me at the time. I remember how once we changed pyjamas and you let me sleep in yours in *your* bed all night. I've never felt closer to you than I did that night, as if I didn't just take on your clothes, but also a bit of you—as if I became you for a little while. I had never felt so happy. Because, though we always looked a little alike, though we were the same height and had the same colouring, I never had your strength of character. Just then, for a moment, I knew what it was like to be Larry Renshaw.

"It was wonderful for me to see you last week. I'm only sorry it

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was for such a short time. Remember, if there's ever *anything* I can do for you, you have only to ask. If you want to meet up again, do ring. I'm only over here sorting out some problem on my uncle's will and as I'm pretty hard up, I spend most of my time in my room at the hotel. But if I *am* out when you ring, they'll take a message. I'll be going back to France at the end of the week, but I'd really like to see you before then. I sometimes think I'll take my courage in both hands and come round to your flat, but I know you wouldn't really like it, particularly now you're *married to that woman*. It was quite a shock when you told me about your marriage. I had always had a secret hope that the reason you never *had* married was—"

Larry stopped reading. Not only had the mention of his marriage brought his mind back to the murder of Lydia, he also found the letter distasteful.

It wasn't being the object of a homosexual passion that worried or challenged him. He had no doubt where his own tastes lay. He didn't even think he had gone through a homosexual phase in adolescence, but he had always had a strong libido, and what other outlet was there in a boys' boarding school? All the other Big Boys had had Little Boys, so he had played the games tradition demanded. But as soon as he had been released from that particular prison, he had quickly discovered, and concentrated on, the instinctive pleasures of heterosexuality.

But Peter Mostyn hadn't changed. He'd make contact every few years, suggesting a lunch, and Larry, aware that a free meal was one he didn't have to pay for, would agree to meet. Their conversation would be stilted, spiralling round topics long dead, and Larry would finish up his brandy and leave as soon as the bill arrived. Then, within a week, one of the "poste restante" barmen would hand over a letter full of closely written obsequious gratitude and assurances of continuing devotion.

For Mostyn the dormitory grappling had obviously meant more and he had frozen like an insect in the amber of adolescence. That was what depressed Larry. He hated the past, he didn't like to think about it. For him there was always the hope of the big win just around the next corner, and he would rather concentrate on that than on the disasters behind him.

He could forget the past so easily, instinctively sloughing off the skin of one shady failure to slither out with a shining new identity ready for the next infallible scheme. This protean ability had enabled

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him to melt from stockbroker's clerk to Army recruit (after a few bounced cheques), from Army reject to mail-order manager (after a few missing boxes of ammunition), from mail-order manager to pimp (after a few prepaid but undelivered orders), and from pimp to hotel porter (after a police raid). And it had facilitated the latest metamorphosis, from hotel porter to Savile-Row-suited husband of a rich neurotic dipsomaniac (just before the inevitable theft inquiry). For Larry, change and hope went hand in hand.

So Peter Mostyn's devotion was an unpleasant intrusion. It suggested that, whatever his current identity, there remained in Larry an unchanging core that could still be loved. It threatened his independence in a way the love of women never had. His heterosexual affairs were all brisk and physical, soon ended, leaving in him no adverse emotion that couldn't be erased by another conquest and, in the women, undiluted resentment.

But Peter Mostyn's avowed love was something else—an unpleasant reminder of his continuing identity, almost a *memento mori.* And Peter Mostyn himself was even more of a *memento mori.*

They had met the previous week for the first time in six years. Once again, old habits had died hard, and Larry had instinctively taken the bait of a free meal in spite of his new opulence.

As soon as he saw Peter Mostyn, he knew it was a bad idea. He felt like Dorian Gray meeting his picture face to face. The Little Boy had aged so unattractively that his appearance was a challenge to Larry's vigour and smartness. After all, they were about the same age—no, hell, Mostyn was younger. At school he had been the Little Boy to Larry's Big Boy. A couple of forms behind, so a couple of years younger.

And yet to see him, you'd think he was on the verge of death. He had been ill, apparently; Larry seemed to remember his saying something over the lunch about having been ill. Perhaps that explained the long tubular crutches and the general air of debility. But it was no excuse for the teeth and the hair—the improvement of those was quite within his power. O.K., most of us lose some teeth, but that doesn't mean we have to go around with a mouth like a drawstring purse. Larry prided himself on his own false teeth. One of the first things he'd done after marrying Lydia had been to set up a series of private dental appointments and have his mouth filled with the best replacements money could buy.

And the hair. Larry was thinning a bit and would have been greying but for the discreet preparation he bought from his Jermyn

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Street hairdresser. But he liked to think that, even if he had been so unfortunate as to lose all his hair, he wouldn't have resorted to a toupé that looked like a small brown mammal that had been run over by a day's traffic on the M1.

And yet that was how Peter Mostyn had appeared, a hobbling creature with concave lips and hair that lacked any credibility. And, to match his physical state, he had demonstrated his emotional crippledom with the same adolescent infatuation and unwholesome self-pity, the same constant assertions that he would do anything for his friend, that he felt his own life to be without value and only likely to take on meaning if it could be used in the service of Larry Renshaw.

Larry didn't like any of it. Particularly he didn't like the constant use of the past tense, as if life from now on would be an increasingly crepuscular experience. He thought in the future tense, and of a future that was infinite now that he had Lydia's money.

Now that he had Lydia's money... He looked at his watch. A quarter to eight. She should be a good five hours dead. Time to put thoughts of that tired old queen Mostyn behind him and get on with the main business of the day. Time for the dutiful husband to go home and discover his wife's body. Or if he was really lucky, discover that his sister-in-law had just discovered his wife's body.

He said goodbye loudly to Mario, and made some quip about the barman's new apron. He also asked if the barroom clock was right and checked his watch against it.

After a lifetime of obscuring details of timing and squeezing alibis from forgotten minutes, it was an amusing novelty to draw attention to time. And to himself.

For the same reason, he exchanged memorable banter with the driver of the taxi he picked up in a still-light Piccadilly Circus before settling back for the journey to Abbey Road.

Now he felt supremely confident. He was following his infallible instinct. The plan was the work of a mastermind. He even had a twinge of regret to think that when he had all Lydia's money that mind would be lost to crime. But no, he didn't intend to hazard his newfound fortune by doing anything mildly risky. He needed freedom to cram into his remaining rich life what he had missed out on in poorer days.

Which was why the murder plan was so good. It contained no risk at all.

In fact, although he didn't consciously realize it at the time he

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had got the murder plan at the same time he had got Lydia. She had come ready-packed with her own self-destruct mechanism. The complete kit.

Lydia had fallen in love with Larry when he saved her life, and had married him out of gratitude.

It had happened two years previously. Larry Renshaw had been at the lowest ebb of a career that had known many freak tides. He had been working as a porter at a Park Lane hotel, whose management was beginning to suspect him of helping himself from the wallets, handbags, and jewel-cases of the guests. One afternoon he had received a tipoff that they were on to him, and determined to make one last reasonable-sized haul before another sudden exit and change of identity.

Observation and staff gossip led him to use his passkey on the door of a Mrs. Lydia Phythian, a lady whose Christmas-tree appearances in the bar left no doubts about her possession of a considerable stock of jewellery, and whose consumption of gin in the same bar suggested that she might be a little careless in locking away her decorations.

So it proved. Necklaces, brooches, bracelets, and rings lay among the pill bottles on the dressing table as casually as stranded seaweed. But there was also in the room something that promised a far richer and less risky haul than a fence's grudging prices for the gems.

There was Mrs. Lydia Phythian, in the process of committing suicide.

The scene was classic to the point of being corny. An empty gin bottle clutched in the hand of the snoring figure on the bed, on the bedside table an empty pill-bottle dramatically on its side, and propped against the lamp a folded sheet of crisp blue monogrammed notepaper.

The first thing Larry did was to read the note.

This was the only way out. Nobody cares whether I live or die and I don't want to go on just being a burden. I've tried, but life's too much.

It was undated. Instinctively, Larry put it in his pocket before turning his attention to the figure on the bed. She was deeply asleep, but her pulses were still strong. Remembering some movie with this scene in it, he slapped her face.

Her eyes came woozily open. "I want to die. Why shouldn't I die?"

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"Because there's so much to live for," he replied, possibly remembering dialogue from the same movie.

Her eyes rolled shut again. He rang for an ambulance. Instinct told him to get an outside line and ring the Emergency Services direct; he didn't want the manager muscling in on his act.

Then, again following the pattern of the movie, he walked her sagging body up and down, keeping her semi-conscious until help arrived.

Thereafter he just followed instinct. Instinct told him to accompany her in the ambulance to the hospital; instinct told him to return (out of his hotel uniform) to be there when she came round after the ministrations of the stomach pump; instinct told him to continue his visits when she was moved to the recuperative luxury of the Avenue Clinic. And instinct provided the words which assured her that there really was a lot to live for, and that it was insane for a woman as attractive as her to feel unloved, and that he at least appreciated her true worth.

So their marriage three months after she came out of the clinic was really a triumph of instinct.

A couple of days before the registry-office ceremony, Larry Renshaw had fixed to see her doctor. "I felt, you know, that I should know her medical history now that we're going to be together for life," he said in a responsible voice. "I mean, I'm not asking you to give away any professional secrets, but obviously I want to ensure that there isn't a recurrence of the appalling incident which brought us together."

"Of course." The doctor was bald, thin, and frankly sceptical. He did not seem to be taken in by Larry's performance as the concerned husband-to-be. "Well, she's a very neurotic woman, she likes to draw attention to herself. Nothing's going to change her basic character."

"I thought, being married . . ."

"She's been married a few times before, you must know that."

"Yes, of course, but she seems to have had pretty bad luck and been landed with a lot of bastards. I thought, given someone who really loves her for herself . . ."

"Oh yes, I'm sure she'd be a lot more stable, given *that*." The scepticism was now so overt as to be insulting, but Larry didn't risk righteous anger, as the doctor went on, "The trouble is, Mr. Renshaw, women as rich as Mrs. Phythian tend to meet up with rather a lot of bastards."

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Larry ignored the second insult. "What I really wanted to know was—"

"What you really wanted to know," the doctor interrupted, "was whether she was likely to attempt suicide again."

Larry nodded gravely.

"Well, I can't tell you. Someone who takes as many pills and who drinks as much as she does is rarely fully rational. This wasn't her first attempt, though it was different from the others."

"How?"

"The previous ones were more obviously simply demands for attention—she made pretty sure that she'd be found before anything too serious happened. In this case—well, if you hadn't walked into the room I think she'd have gone the distance. Incidentally—"

But Larry spoke before the inevitable question about why he came to be in her room. "Were there any other differences this time?"

"Small ones. The way she crushed up all the pills into the gin before she started suggested a more positive approach. And the fact that there was no note . . ."

Larry didn't respond to the quizzical look. When he left, the doctor shook him by the hand and said with undisguised irony, "I wouldn't worry. I'm sure everything will work out *for you.*"

The insolent distrust was back in that final emphasis, but mixed in the doctor's voice with another feeling, one of relief. At least a new husband would keep Mrs. Phythian out of his surgery for a little while. There would just be a series of repeat prescriptions for tranquillisers and sleeping pills, and he could still charge her for those.

Subconsciously, Larry knew that the doctor had confirmed how easy it would be for him to murder his wife, but he didn't let himself think about it. After all, why should it be necessary?

At first it wasn't. Mrs. Lydia Phythian changed her name again—she was almost rivalling her husband in the number of identities she had taken on—and become Mrs. Lydia Renshaw. At first the marriage worked pretty well. She enjoyed kitting out her new husband and he enjoyed being taken round to expensive shops and being treated by her. He found her a surprisingly avid sexual partner and, although he couldn't have subsisted on that diet alone, secret snacks with other women kept him agreeably nourished and he began to think marriage suited him.

Certainly it brought him a lifestyle he had never before experi-

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enced. Having been brought up by parents whose middle-class insistence on putting him through minor public school had dragged their living standards down to working-class and below, and then having never been securely wealthy for more than a fortnight, he was well placed to appreciate the large flat in Abbey Road, the country house in Uckfield, and the choice of driving a Bentley or a little Mercedes.

In fact, there were only two things about his wife that annoyed him—her unwillingness to let him see other women and the restricted amount of pocket money she allowed him.

He had found ways around the second problem; in fact, he had reverted to his old ways to get round the second problem. He had started, very early in their marriage, stealing from his wife.

At first he had done it indirectly. She had trustingly put him in charge of her portfolio of investments, which made it very easy for him to cream off what he required for his day-to-day needs. However, a stormy meeting with Lydia's broker and accountant, who threatened to disclose all to their employer, persuaded him to relinquish these responsibilities.

So he started robbing his wife directly. The alcoholic haze in which she habitually moved made this fairly easy. Mislaying a ring or a small necklace, or even finding her wallet empty within a few hours of going to the bank, were common occurrences and not ones to which she liked to draw attention since they raised the question of how much her drinking affected her memory.

Larry spent a certain amount of this loot on other women, but the bulk of it he consigned to a suitcase, which every three or four weeks was moved discreetly to another Left Luggage office—premarital habits again dying hard. Over some twenty months of marriage, he had accumulated between twelve and thirteen thousand pounds, which was a comforting hedge against adversity.

But he didn't expect adversity. Or at least he didn't expect adversity until he discovered that his wife had put a private detective onto him and had compiled a dossier of a fortnight's infidelities.

It was then that he knew he had to murder her, and had to do it quickly, before the meeting with her solicitor she had mentioned when confronting him with the detective's report. Larry Renshaw had no intention of being divorced from his wife's money.

As soon as he had made the decision, the murder plan that he had shut up in the Left Luggage locker of his subconscious was revealed

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by a simple turn of a key. It was so simple, he glowed from the beauty of it.

He went through it again as he sat in the cab on the way to Abbey Road. The timing was perfect; there was no way it could fail.

Every three months Lydia spent four days at a health farm. The aim was not primarily to dry her out but to put a temporary brake on the runaway deterioration of her physical charms. However, the strictness of the fashionable institution chosen to take on this hopeless task meant that the visit did have the side-effect of keeping her off alcohol for its duration. The natural consequence of this was that on the afternoon of her return she would, regular as clockwork, irrigate her parched system with at least half a bottle of gin.

And that was all the plan needed. His instinct told him it couldn't fail.

He had made the preparations that morning, almost joyously. He had whistled softly as he worked. There was so little to do. Crush up the pills into the gin bottle, place the suicide note in the desk drawer, and set out to spend his day in company. No part of that day was to be unaccounted for. Gaston's Bar was only the last link in a long chain of alibi.

During the day he had probed at the plan, testing it for weaknesses, and found none.

Suppose Lydia thought the gin tasted funny? She wouldn't, in her haste. Anyway, in her descriptions of the previous attempt, she had said there was no taste. It had been, she said, just like drinking it neat and getting gently drowsier and drowsier. A quiet end. Not an unattractive one.

Suppose the police found out about the private detective and the appointment with the solicitor? Wouldn't they begin to suspect the dead woman's husband? No, if anything, that strengthened his case. Disillusioned by yet another man, depressed by the prospect of yet another divorce, she had taken the quickest way out. True, it didn't put her husband in a very good light, but Larry was not worried about that. So long as he inherited, he didn't care what people thought.

Suppose she had already made a will which disinherited him? He knew she hadn't. That was what she'd set up with the solicitor for the next day. And Larry had been present when she made her previous will that named him, her husband, as sole legatee.

No, his instinct told him nothing could go wrong . . .

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He paid off the taxi-driver and told him a joke he had heard in the course of the day.

He then went into their block of flats, told the porter the same joke, and asked if he could check the right time. Eight-seventeen. Never had there been a better-documented day.

As he went up in the lift, he wondered if the final refinement to the plan had happened. It wasn't essential, but it would have been nice. Lydia's sister had said she would drop round for the evening. If she could actually have discovered the body . . . Still, she was notoriously bad about time and you can't have everything. But it would be nice . . .

Everything played into his hands. On the landing he met a neighbour just about to walk his chihuahua. Larry greeted them cheerfully and checked the time. His confidence was huge. He enjoyed being a criminal mastermind.

For the benefit of the departing neighbour and because he was going to play the part to the hilt, he called out cheerily, "Good evening, darling!" as he unlocked the front door.

"Good evening, *darling*," said Lydia.

As soon as he saw her, he knew that she knew everything. She sat poised on the sofa, and on the glass coffee table in front of her were the bottle of gin and the suicide note. If they had been labelled in a courtroom, they couldn't have been more clearly marked as evidence. On a table to the side of the sofa stood a half empty bottle of gin. The bloody, boozy bitch—she couldn't even wait until she got home, she'd taken on new supplies on the way back from the health farm.

"Well, Larry, I dare say you're surprised to see me."

"A little," he said lightly, and smiled what he had always believed to be a charming smile.

"I think I'll have quite a lot to say to my solicitor tomorrow."

He laughed lightly.

"After I've been to the police," she continued.

His next laugh was more brittle.

"Yes, Larry, there are quite a few things to talk about. For a start, I've just done an inventory of my jewellery. And do you know, I think I've suddenly realized why you appeared in my hotel room that fateful afternoon. Once a thief, always a thief. But murder—that's going up a league for you, isn't it?"

The gin hadn't got to her; she was speaking with cold coherence.

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Larry slowed down his mind to match her logical deliberation. He walked over to his desk in the corner by the door. When he turned round, he was holding the gun he kept in its drawer.

Lydia laughed, loudly and unattractively, as if in derision of his manhood. "Oh, come on, Larry, that's not very subtle. No, your other little scheme was quite clever, I'll give you that. But to shoot me . . . They'd never let you inherit. You aren't allowed to profit from a crime."

"I'm not going to shoot you." He moved across and pointed the gun at her head. "I'm going to make you drink from that other gin bottle."

Again he got the harsh, challenging laugh. "Oh, come on, sweetie. What kind of threat is that? There's a basic fault in your logic. You can't make people kill themselves by threatening to kill them. If you gotta go, who cares about the method? And if you intend to kill me, I'll ensure that you do it the way that gives you most trouble. Shoot away, sweetie."

Involuntarily, he lowered the arm holding the gun.

She laughed again.

"Anyway, I'm bored with this." She rose from the sofa. "I'm going to ring the police. I've had enough of being married to a criminal mastermind."

The taunt so exactly reflected his self-image that it stung like a blow. His gun-arm stiffened again and he shot her in the temple as she made her way towards the telephone.

There was a lot of blood. At first he stood there mesmerized by how much blood there was, but then, as the flow stopped, his mind started to work again.

Its deliberations were not comforting. He had blown it. The best he could hope for now was escape.

Unnaturally calm, he went to the telephone. He rang Heathrow. There was a ten o'clock flight. Yes, there was a seat. He booked it.

He took the spare cash from Lydia's handbag. Under ten pounds. She hadn't been to the bank since her return from the health farm. Still, he could use a credit card to pay for the ticket.

He went into the bedroom, where her jewellery lay in its customary disarray. He reached out for a diamond choker.

But no. Supposed the Customs searched him. That was just the sort of trouble he had to avoid. For the same reason, he couldn't take the jewellery from his case in the Left Luggage office. Where was it now, anyway? Oh, no! Liverpool Street! Fumes of panic rose to

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his brain. There wouldn't be time. Or would there? Maybe if he just got the money from the case and—

The doorbell rang.

Oh, my God! Lydia's sister!

He grabbed a suitcase, threw in his pyjamas and a clean shirt, then rushed into the kitchen, opened the back door, and ran down the fire escape.

Peter Mostyn's cottage was in the Department of the Lot. The nearest large town was Cahors, the nearest small town was Montaigu-de-Quercy, but neither was very near. The cottage itself was small and primitive. Mostyn was not a British trendy making a fashionable home in France; he had moved there in search of obscurity and lived very cheaply, constantly calculating how many years he could remain there on the dwindling capital he had been left by a remote uncle and hoping it would last out his lifetime. He didn't have more contact with the locals than weekly shopping demanded, and both sides seemed happy with this arrangement.

Larry Renshaw arrived there on the third night after Lydia's death. He had travelled unobtrusively by local trains, thumbed lifts, and long stretches of cross-country walking, sleeping in the fields by night. He had sold his Savile Row suit for a tenth of its value in a Paris second-hand clothes shop, where he had bought a set of stained blue overalls, which made him less conspicuous tramping along the sun-baked roads of France. His passport and gold identity bracelet were secure in an inside pocket.

If there was any chase, he reckoned he was ahead of it.

It had been dark for about four hours when he reached the cottage. It was a warm summer night. The countryside was dry and brittle, needing rain. Although the occasional car had flashed past on the narrow local roads, he had not met any pedestrians.

There was a meager slice of moon which showed him enough to dash another hope. In the back of his mind had lurked the possibility that Mostyn, in spite of his constant assertions of poverty, lived in luxury and would prove as well fleshed a body as Lydia to batten on. But the crumbling exterior of the cottage told him that the long-term solution to his problems would have to lie elsewhere. The building had hardly changed at all through many generations of peasant owners.

And when Mostyn came to the door, he could have been the latest representative of that peasant dynasty. His wig was off, he wore a

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shapeless sort of nightshirt and clutched a candle-holder out of a Dickens television serial. The toothless lips moved uneasily and in his eye was an old peasant distrust of outsiders.

That expression vanished as soon as he recognized his visitor.

"Larry. I hoped you'd come to me. I read about it in the papers. Come inside. You'll be safe here."

Safe he certainly was. Mostyn's limited social round meant that there was no danger of the newcomer being recognized. No danger of his even being seen. For three days the only person Larry Renshaw saw was Peter Mostyn.

And Peter Mostyn still hadn't changed at all. He remained a pathetic cripple, rendered even more pathetic by his cringing devotion. For him Renshaw's appearance was the answer to a prayer. Now at last he had the object of his affections in his own home. He was in seventh heaven.

Renshaw wasn't embarrassed by the devotion; he knew Mostyn was far too diffident to try and force unwelcome attentions on him. For a little while at least he had found sanctuary and was content for a couple of days to sit and drink his host's brandy and assess his position.

The assessment wasn't encouraging. Everything had turned sour. All the careful plans he had laid for Lydia's death now worked against him. The elaborate fixing of the time of his arrival at the flat no longer established his alibi; it now pointed the finger of murder at him. Even after he'd shot her, he might have been able to sort something out but for that bloody sister of hers ringing the bell and making him panic. Everything had turned out wrong.

On the third evening, as he sat silent at the table, savagely drinking brandy while Mostyn watched him, Renshaw shouted out against the injustice of it all. "That bloody bitch!"

"Lydia?" asked Mostyn hesitantly.

"No, you fool. Her sister. If she hadn't turned up just at that moment, I'd have got away with it. I'd have thought of something."

"At what moment?"

"Just after I'd shot Lydia. She rang the bell."

"What—about eight-thirty?"

"Yes."

Mostyn paled beneath his toupé. "That wasn't Lydia's sister."

"What? How do you know?"

"It was me." Renshaw looked at him. "It was me. I was flying back

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the next morning. You hadn't *rung*. I so wanted to see you before I left, so I came to the flats. I didn't *intend* to go in. But I just asked the porter if you were there and he said you'd just arrived."

"It was you! You bloody fool, why didn't you say?"

"I didn't know what had happened. I just—"

"You idiot! You bloody idiot!" The frustration of the last few days and the brandy came together in a wave of fury. Renshaw seized Mostyn by the lapels and shook him. "If I had known it was you . . . You could have saved my life! You bloody fool! You . . ."

"I didn't know, I didn't know," the Little Boy whimpered. "When there was no reply, I just went back to the hotel. Honestly, if I'd known what was happening . . . I'd do anything for you, you *know* I would. Anything . . ."

Renshaw slackened his grasp on Mostyn's lapels and returned to Mostyn's brandy.

It was the next day that he took up the offer. They sat over the debris of lunch. "Peter, you said you'd do anything for me . . ."

"Of course, and I meant it. My life hasn't been much. You're the only person that matters to me. I'd do anything for you. I'll look after you here for as long as—"

"I'm not staying here. I have to get away."

Mostyn's face betrayed his hurt. Renshaw ignored it and continued, "For that I need money."

"I've told you, you can have anything I—"

"No, I know you haven't got any money. Not real money. But I have. In the Left Luggage office at Liverpool Street Station I have over twelve thousand pounds in cash and jewellery." Renshaw looked at Mostyn with the smile he had always believed to be charming. "I want you to go to England to fetch it for me."

"What? But I'd never get it back over here."

"Yes, you would. You're the ideal smuggler. You put the stuff in your crutches. They'd never suspect someone like you."

"But I—"

Renshaw looked hurt. "You said you'd do anything for me."

"Well, I would, but—"

"You can go into Cahors tomorrow and fix the flight."

"But—but that means you'll leave me again."

"For a little while, yes. I'd come back," Renshaw lied.

"I—"

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"Please do it for me." Renshaw put on an expression he knew to be vulnerable. "Please."

"All right, I will."

"Bless you, bless you. Come on, let's drink to it."

"I don't drink much. It makes me sleepy. I haven't got the head for it. I—"

"Come on, drink."

Mostyn hadn't got the head for it. As the afternoon progressed, he became more and more embarrassingly devoted. Then he fell into a comatose sleep.

The day after next, the plane ticket was on the dining-room table next to Peter Mostyn's passport. Upstairs his small case was packed ready. He was to fly from Paris in three days' time, on the Wednesday. He would be back at the cottage by the weekend with the money and jewels which would be Renshaw's lifeline.

Renshaw's confidence started to return. With money in his pocket, everything would once more become possible. Twelve thousand pounds was plenty to buy a new identity and start again. Talent like his, he knew, could not be kept down for long.

Mostyn was obviously uneasy about the task ahead of him, but he had been carefully briefed and he'd manage it all right. The Big Boy was entrusting him with a mission and the Little Boy would see that it was efficiently discharged.

A new harmony came into their relationship. Now that his escape had a date on it, Renshaw could relax and even be pleasant to his protector. Mostyn glowed with gratitude for the attention. It didn't take much to make him happy, Renshaw thought contemptuously. Once again, as he looked at the prematurely aged and crippled figure, he found it incongruous that their bodies had ever touched. Mostyn had never been other than pathetic.

Still, he was useful. And though it was making huge inroads into his carefully husbanded wealth, he kept the supply of brandy flowing. Renshaw topped up his tumbler again after lunch on the Monday afternoon. It was then that there was a knock at the door. Mostyn leapt nervously to the window to check out the visitor. When he looked back at Renshaw, his face had even less colour under its thatch. "It's a gendarme."

Moving quickly and efficiently, Larry Renshaw picked up his dirty plate, together with the brandy bottle and tumbler, and went up-

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stairs. His bedroom window was above the sloping roof of the porch. If anyone came up, he would be able to make a quick getaway.

He heard conversation downstairs, but it was too indistinct and his knowledge of French too limited for him to understand it. Then he heard the front door shut. From his window he saw the gendarme go to his bike and cycle off towards Montaigu-de-Quercy.

He gave it five minutes and went downstairs. Peter Mostyn sat at the table, literally shaking.

"What the hell's the matter?"

"The gendarme—he asked if I'd seen you."

"So you said you hadn't."

"Yes, but . . ."

"But what? That's all there is to it, surely. There's been an Interpol alert to check out any contacts I might have abroad. They got your name from my address book back at the flat. So now the local bobby here has done his bit and will report back that you haven't seen me since last week in London. End of story. I'm glad it's happened. At least now I don't have to wait for it."

"Yes, but, Larry, look at the state I'm in."

"You'll calm down. Come on, O.K., it was a shock, but you'll get over it."

"That's not what I mean. What I'm saying is, if I'm in this state now, I just won't be able to go through with what I'm supposed to be doing on Wednesday."

"Look, all you have to do is to catch a plane to London, go to the Liverpool Street Left Luggage office, get the case, go to somewhere conveniently quiet, load the stuff into your crutches, and come back here! There's no danger!"

"I can't do it, Larry. I *can't*. I'll crack up. I'll give myself away somehow. If I were like you, I could do it. You've always had a strong nerve for that sort of thing. I wish it were you who was going to do it, because I know you *could*. But I just . . ."

He petered out. Anger invaded Renshaw. "Listen, you little worm, you've got to do it! Good God, you've said enough times you'd do anything for me—and now the first time I ask for something you're bloody chicken!"

"Larry, I would do anything for you, I would. But I just don't think I *can* go through with this. I'd mess it up somehow. Honestly, Larry, if there were anything *else* I could do . . ."

"Anything else? How about getting me off the murder charge?

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Maybe you'd like to do that instead?" Renshaw asked with acid sarcasm.

"If I could. . . Or if I had enough money to be any use. . . Or if . . ."

"Oh, shut up, you useless little queen!" Larry Renshaw stomped savagely upstairs with the brandy bottle.

They did not speak to each other for over twenty-four hours.

But the next evening, as he lay on the bed drinking brandy, watching the declining sun tinge the scrubby oak trees of the hillside with gold, Renshaw's instinct started to take over again. It was a warm feeling. Once more he felt protected. His instinct was an Almighty Big Boy, looking after him, guiding him, showing him the way forward, as it always had done before.

After about an hour, he heard the front door and saw Mostyn setting off down the road that led to Montaigu-de-Quercy. Again. He'd been out more than once since their row. No doubt going to buy more brandy as a peace offering. Poor little sod. Renshaw chuckled to himself at the aptness of the description.

Alone in the cottage, he dozed. The bang of the door on Mostyn's return woke him. And he was not surprised to wake up with his plan of campaign worked out in every detail.

Peter Mostyn looked up like a mongrel fearing a kick, but Larry Renshaw smiled at him and was amused to see how gratefully the expression changed. Mostyn had all the weakness of the sort of women Renshaw had spent his life avoiding.

"Larry, look, I'm terribly sorry about yesterday afternoon. I was just a coward. Look, I really *do* want to do something for you. You know I'd give my life for you if I thought it'd be any use. It's been a pretty wasted life—I'd like it to do *something* valuable."

"But not go to London and pick up my things?" Renshaw asked lightly.

"I just don't think I *could*, Larry, I don't think I have it *in me*. But I will go to London tomorrow. There's something else I can do for you. I *can* help you. I *have* helped you already. I—"

"Never mind." Renshaw spread his hands in a magnanimous gesture of forgiveness. "Never mind. Listen, Peter," he went on intimately, "I behaved like a swine yesterday and I want to apologize. I'm sorry, this whole thing's been a dreadful strain and I just haven't been appreciating all you're doing for me. Please forgive me."

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"You've been fine. I . . ." Mostyn's expression hovered between surprise and delight at his friend's change of behaviour.

"No, I've been being a swine. Peace offering." He drew his hand out of his pocket and held it towards Mostyn.

"But you don't want to give me that. It's your identity bracelet, it's got your name on. And it's gold. I mean, you'd—"

"Please . . ."

Mostyn took the bracelet and slipped it onto his thin wrist.

"Listen, Peter, I've been so confused I haven't been thinking straight. Forget the money in London. Maybe I'll get it someday, maybe I won't. The important thing is that I'm safe at the moment, with a *friend*. A very good friend. Peter, what I want to ask is—can I stay here for a bit?" He looked up humbly. "If you don't mind."

"Mind? Look, you know, Larry, I'd be delighted. *Delighted*. You don't have to ask that."

"Bless you, Peter." Renshaw spoke softly, as if choked by emotion. Then he perked up. "If that's settled then, let's drink on it."

"I won't, thank you, Larry. You know it only makes me sleepy."

"Oh, come on, Peter. If we're going to live together, we've got to learn to enjoy the same hobbies." And he filled two tumblers with brandy.

The prospect opened up by the words "live together" was too much for Mostyn. There were tears in his eyes as he drained the first drink.

It was about an hour and a half later when Renshaw judged the moment to be right. Mostyn was slurring his words and yawning, but still conscious. His eyes focused in pleasure for a moment when Renshaw murmured, "Why don't we go upstairs?"

"Whaddya mean?"

"You know what I mean." He giggled.

"Really? Really?"

Renshaw nodded.

Mostyn rose, swaying, to his feet. "Where are my crutches?"

"They won't help you stand up straight in the state you're in." Renshaw giggled again, and Mostyn joined in. Renshaw ruffled his Little Boy's hair, and the toupé came off in his hand.

"Gimme thaback."

"When I come upstairs," Renshaw murmured softly. Then, in an even lower whisper, "Go up to my room, get my pyjamas, put them on, and get into my bed. I'll be up soon."

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Mostyn smiled with fuddled pleasure and started off up the stairs. Renshaw heard the uneven footsteps in his room above, then the hobbling noises of undressing, the thump of a body hitting the bed, and soon, predictably, silence.

He sat for about a quarter of an hour finishing his drink. Then, whistling softly, he started to make his preparations.

He moved slowly, but efficiently, following the infallible dictates of his instinct. First he went into the little bathroom and shaved off his remaining hair. It took a surprisingly short time. Then he removed his false teeth and put them in a glass of water.

He went cautiously up the stairs and inched open the door of his bedroom. As expected, Mostyn lay unconscious from the unaccustomed alcohol.

Unhurriedly, Renshaw placed the glass of teeth on the bedside table. Then he changed into the clothes Mostyn had just abandoned on the floor. He went into the other bedroom, picked up the overnight case that had been packed, and returned downstairs.

He picked up the air ticket and passport, which still lay accusingly on the dining table. He put on the toupé and compared his reflection with the passport photograph. The picture was ten years old and the resemblance quite sufficient. He picked up the crutches and tried them until he could reproduce the limp that appeared in the "Special Peculiarities" section.

Then he picked up the half full brandy bottle, another unopened one, and the candle on the table, and went upstairs.

The Little Boy lay on his Big Boy's bed, in his Big Boy's pyjamas, even wearing his Big Boy's gold identity bracelet, but was in no state to appreciate this longed-for felicity. He did not stir as his Big Boy sprinkled brandy over the bedclothes, the rush matting, and the wooden floorboards. Nor did he stir when his Big Boy set the lighted candle on the floor and watched its flames spread.

Larry Renshaw felt the usual confidence that following his instinct produced as he travelled back to London in the identity of Peter Mostyn. He even found there were compensations in being a pathetic, toothless cripple on crutches. People made way for him at the airport and helped him with his bags.

On the plane he mused comfortably about his next movements. Certainly his first port of call must be the Left Luggage office at Liverpool Street. And then probably one of the fences he already

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knew, to turn the jewellery into cash. Then, who could say? Possibly abroad again. . . Certainly a new identity . . .

But there was no hurry. That was the luxury his instinct had achieved for him. In Mostyn's identity he was safe for as long as he could stand being such a pathetic figure. There was no hurry.

He felt tense as he approached Passport Control at Heathrow. Not frightened—he was confident his instinct would see him through—but tense. After all, if there was a moment when his identity was most likely to be questioned, this was it. But if he was accepted here as Peter Mostyn, then he had nothing more to worry about.

It was slightly unnerving, because the Passport Officer seemed to be expecting him. "Ah, Mr. Mostyn," he said. "If you'd just take a seat here for a moment, I'll tell them you've arrived."

"But I—" No, better not to make a scene. Reserve righteous indignation for later. Must be some minor mix-up. He imagined how feebly Peter Mostyn would whine at the nuisances of bureaucracy.

He didn't have long to wait. Two men in raincoats arrived and asked him to go with them to a small room. They did not speak again until they were all seated.

"Now," said the man who seemed to be senior, "let's talk about the murder of Mrs. Lydia Renshaw."

"Mrs. Lydia Renshaw?" echoed Larry Renshaw, bemused. "But I'm Peter Mostyn."

"Yes," said the man, "we know that. There's no question about that. And that's why we want to talk to you about the murder of Mrs. Lydia Renshaw."

"But . . . why?" Larry Renshaw asked, quite as pathetically as Peter Mostyn would have done.

"Why?" The man seemed puzzled. "Well, because of your letter of confession that arrived this morning."

It was some time before he actually saw the document that had incriminated him, but it didn't take him long to imagine its contents:

Because of his long-standing homosexual attraction to Larry Renshaw, Peter Mostyn had gone round to see him the evening before he was due to return to his home in France. At the block of flats in Abbey Road—where he was seen by the porter—he had found, not Renshaw, but Renshaw's wife, the woman who, in his eyes, had irrevocably alienated the affections of his friend. An argument had ensued, in the course of which he had shot his rival. Larry Renshaw,

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returning to his flat, seeing his wife's body and guessing what had happened, had immediately set off for France in pursuit of the murderer. It was Renshaw's arrival at his home that had prompted Peter Mostyn to make a clean breast of what he had done. . .

This put Larry Renshaw in a rather difficult position. Since he was now innocent, he could in theory claim back his own identity. But he had a nasty feeling that that would raise more questions than it would answer.

His instinct, now diminished to a limping, apologetic, pathetic thing, advised him to remain as Peter Mostyn, the Little Boy who has made the supreme sacrifice to protect his Big Boy.

So it was as Peter Mostyn that he was charged with, and found guilty of, the murder of Mrs. Lydia Renshaw.

And it was as Peter Mostyn that he was later charged with, and found guilty of, the murder of Larry Renshaw.

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a *NEW* Mr. Strang story by

WILLIAM BRITTAIN

Mr. Strang leaned forward in his aluminum folding chair and glanced from one to another of the faces made ghostly by the flickering flames of the driftwood fire. Why? *There was the rub. Why would anyone steal a souvenir worth next to nothing? Another five days and the tour would be over. Five days to answer a single question*—why? . . .

MR. STRANG TAKES A TOUR

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

"I'm Mindy MacGregor, your tour guide," said the uniformed girl with the microphone as soon as the bus started to move, "and Sam Kent here will be doing the driving. For the next eight days, Sam and I will take care of everything you need or want."

Several of the male passengers grinned widely and sighed with feigned passion.

"Well, *almost* everything," Mindy went on, her face reddening. "We'll be crossing the border after lunch and reach Quebec this evening. Following a day of sightseeing there, we'll circle the beautiful Gaspé Peninsula, with overnight stops at the villages of Matane, Rivière Madeleine, Perce, and Carleton. From there, we'll return to the United States and end our tour with a couple of days traveling through New England. So just sit back, relax, and enjoy."

Mr. Strang intended to do exactly that. For the duration of the tour, he wanted no thoughts of Aldershot High School, boorish students, incessant paper work, or how alarmingly fast the summer vacation was coming to an end.

The young woman next to him—no more than twenty-five, if Mr. Strang was any judge of age—extended her hand. "It looks like we'll

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be sitting together for the whole tour," she said. "I'm Sister Geraldine."

"I'm Mr. Str— Make that Leonard." Mr. Strang took the proffered hand in his own gnarled fingers. But then he found himself staring at the girl's green ruffled blouse. "Sister Geraldine? You're a nun? But I thought—"

"I know, I know. You thought all nuns wore long black dresses and wimples and sensible shoes and never went anywhere except in groups of a dozen or more."

Which is exactly what Mr. Strang had been thinking. He nodded. "I must say, Sister, that—"

"Don't say it," she replied firmly. "You sound like every parishioner at St. Ignatius. For this tour my name's just plain Gerry. And you're not to go all frosty and solemn on me, either. My parents gave me this tour as a birthday present and I intend to have as much fun as I can."

Before Mr. Strang could reply, Mindy MacGregor was at the microphone again. "Miss Ada Cermak?" Mindy pointed to a slender, birdlike woman who sat in lonely isolation in the rear seat of the bus. "Is that you?"

The woman mumbled something shyly and nodded.

"Good news, Miss Cermak," announced Mindy archly. "I have a note here that one more tour passenger will be meeting us in Quebec. A Mr. Daniel Gilfoil. So you'll have someone to share the ride with."

Miss Cermak twisted her hands nervously. "I'm not at all sure a man would—I mean, perhaps he'd rather sit somewhere else."

"The only vacant seat is next to you, Miss Cermak," said Mindy. "And I understand Mr. Gilfoil's a bachelor. Eight whole days. This could be your big opportunity."

"I'll take him if you don't want him!" shouted a female voice to a round of laughter.

In the tiny, self-contained world of the tour bus, the distinctive personalities of the tourists soon began to emerge. The three Nugent sisters appropriated as names the words which described Sam Kent on the sign above the windshield. For the entire tour, the plump one would answer only to "Safe," the slender sister became "Reliable," and the one with the jeweled glasses was "Courteous." In the seat behind Mr. Strang, Lola Pepperman extolled the beauty of the countryside in a bellow that threatened to drown out Mindy's electronically amplified lecture, and Herbert, her husband, contented himself with an occasional sigh and a more-than-occasional nip from

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a half concealed flask. Across the aisle, the newlyweds, Harold and Joanne Wynn, ignored the scenery, gazing deep into one another's eyes and generally behaving in the approved fashion for honeymooners.

The bus crossed the Canadian border without incident and reached Quebec City before seven o'clock. After getting settled in his single room, Mr. Strang quickly made his way to the hotel restaurant. The tour passengers were all seated in one area, and he found himself sharing a table with Gerry and the Peppermans. His enthusiasm for the French cuisine was somewhat tempered by the fact that Lola Pepperman turned the entire meal into a bleating recitation of the agonies of her first, second, and third pregnancies.

Afterward, as the four walked out of the restaurant, they passed a tiny table where Ada Cermak and a stout, middle-aged man had their heads together and were talking in low tones.

Lola Pepperman leaned over the table. "I bet you're the new man on the tour," she proclaimed with the delicacy of an avalanche. "You are the lucky one, Miss Cermak. I'd trade my Herbert in for this fella any day of the week."

The man turned and peered at Lola through rimless glasses, at the same time stroking his military mustache with an index finger. "I'm Dan Gilfoil," he said.

Lola made the introductions in a voice better suited for calling hogs. Mr. Strang squelched a desire to muzzle her with a napkin.

As the four walked through the hotel lobby, Herbert Pepperman nudged Mr. Strang and pointed to a rack of newspapers whose headlines proclaimed SUSPECT DE VOL S'EVADE and CANADA-ETATS UNIS SONT D'ACCORD. "Terrible, ain't it?" Pepperman griped. "Nothing's written in your standard English."

The following day, as they strolled through Quebec's walled city, Mr. Strang and Gerry agreed that its quaint buildings, street venders, and artists put them in mind of lithographs of Nineteenth Century Paris. At a sidewalk booth, Gerry bought a cross of polished wood, perhaps a foot long, its two pieces joined by what appeared to be a handwrought nail. The vender wrapped it in wads of newspaper before placing it delicately in a plastic bag as if it were a rare antique rather than a simple souvenir. And when, at lunch, Mr. Strang was able to reach far back into past learning and request of the waitress "L'addition, s'il vous plait," he was both gratified and dumfounded when she brought the check straightaway.

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Early the next morning, after a bountiful breakfast, the forty tourists trooped onto the bus, stowing their hand luggage in the overhead racks before taking their seats. Gerry kept the bag containing the cross on her lap. "Isn't it lovely?" she asked Mr. Strang, taking it from its bag and unwrapping the layers of newsprint. "Only five dollars, too."

"A bag," came a petulant voice from behind them. Lola Pepperman peered over the seat back. "You got a bag. I bought a pin and earrings, and I didn't get any bag. Herbert had to keep the things in his pocket."

"Perhaps if you'd asked—" Mr. Strang began.

"It's not fair," Lola went on. "They should have—"

"Oh, here, take this one," said Gerry in annoyance.

Lola took the proffered bag and settled back triumphantly in her seat. "Gerry, you didn't have to—" Mr. Strang whispered.

"It's all right, Leonard. Anything to shut that woman up. She'll be asking for the cross itself next if I don't get it out of sight." She bundled the cross in its paper wrapping, got to her feet, and placed it in the overhead rack.

As the bus rolled on toward Matane, on the northern rim of the Gaspé, there was much shuffling of luggage as the passengers retrieved their souvenirs of Quebec and passed them around for inspection. The bus's narrow aisle became increasingly crowded, and twice improperly stowed traveling bags tumbled down from the racks onto the heads of passengers beneath. Finally, Sam Kent pulled the bus to the side of the road and said something to Mindy MacGregor. She picked up the microphone.

"I know you all want to show off your souvenirs," she said, "but we're creating a very dangerous situation here. So—*please*—remain in your seats while the bus is moving. If you want anything from your luggage, I'll be happy to get it for you." Her eyes flashed as she looked about, daring anyone to defy her.

The tourists lapsed into guilty silence. The good fairy had suddenly turned into a harpy, and it was all their fault. Though he hadn't budged, Mr. Strang was unaccountably ashamed of himself.

The rest of the journey to Matane was accomplished in silence, punctuated only by an occasional whisper.

As the bus approached the Matane Inn where the tour group would stay that night, Mindy began hauling the hand luggage from the

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overhead racks and handing it to the owners. When the last bag had been lifted down, a puzzled look appeared on Gerry's face. She got up and looked in the racks on both sides of the aisle. Then she examined her seat and the floor beneath.

"Is something wrong?" Mr. Strang asked.

"My cross. It doesn't seem to be here. It's gone."

"Something that big doesn't just vanish," said Mr. Strang. He examined the luggage racks himself. Nothing.

The bus lurched to a halt in front of the inn and Sam Kent reached for the handle to open the door. "A minute, please," said Mr. Strang. "Gerry here is missing a wooden cross. It's probably just gotten mixed in with somebody's luggage, but if anybody runs across it she'd appreciate getting it back."

There were a few sympathetic words, but most of the tourists were more interested in getting off the bus than in the lost cross.

When rooms had been assigned and the heavy luggage delivered and unpacked, the forty travelers got down to the business of entertaining themselves until dinnertime. Safe, Reliable, and Courteous headed for the inn's gift shop. Harold and Joanne Wynn twisted arms and disappeared down a winding woodland path. Dan Gilfoil stroked his mustache with one hand and held Ada Cermak's delicate fingers in the other as the two set out in the direction of a distant lighthouse. And Lola Pepperman trekked along the beach searching for bright pebbles while Herbert followed, literally holding the bag—the one Gerry had given up.

Mr. Strang sat in his small single room, staring at the wall. There was a knock on his door.

"It's me—Gerry," came a voice. "Would you care for a walk?"

Mr. Strang put on a sweater, and soon he and Gerry were strolling along the beach in the direction opposite that of the Peppermans.

"Leonard, you look as if you had all the cares in the world on your shoulders," said Gerry. "What's wrong?"

"I don't suppose your cross turned up anywhere?" Mr. Strang asked hopefully.

"No, not yet. But I'm certain it will."

"I wish I could be that certain," replied Mr. Strang. "Everybody's had plenty of time to unpack. It certainly should have been found by this time."

"No big loss if it isn't found, Leonard. I can afford the five dollars. I'm not about to let it ruin my vacation. And neither should you."

"You don't understand." Mr. Strang pulled his sweater closer

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about his narrow shoulders. "The cross itself is relatively unimportant. But its disappearance confounds me. How could it have happened? It's not as if the thing was so tiny it could have fallen into a crevice somewhere."

"Leonard, I don't want you going on this way. It'll ruin your whole tour."

"Sorry, Gerry. But this brain of mine won't let loose of a problem until it's resolved."

Gerry strode to a huge boulder on the beach and sat down. "All right, Leonard," she said, looking up at him. "Let's talk about the cross. The last time I saw it was when I put it in the overhead rack when I gave the bag to Lola Pepperman. Perhaps it got snagged on a buckle or zipper of somebody's luggage and—and—"

"And whoever it was carried a foot-long cross dangling from a bag or purse?" Mr. Strang asked. "And never noticed it even when unpacking? You don't really believe that, do you?"

"No, I suppose not," replied Gerry tentatively. "But maybe it slid inside an open bag or something. I mean, the bus *was* bumping around a bit on those rough sections of road."

"And in that unlikely event, it would have been the first thing seen by the bag's owner when he unpacked after we arrived," said Mr. Strang. "Has anyone approached you to return the cross?"

Gerry shook her head. For a moment she stared at Mr. Strang thoughtfully. "Leonard," she said finally, "are you implying the cross was deliberately stolen?"

"Can you give me any other explanation?"

"Oh, come on," she said. "I have some passing knowledge of the requirements for conviction." She ticked them off on her fingers. "Motive, means, and opportunity. There were means and opportunity aplenty, I grant you that. The aisle was full of people for a while there today, shifting luggage, opening and closing it. But there's no motive. Why would anybody steal a five-dollar souvenir? It couldn't be sold for enough to make stealing it worthwhile."

"But suppose somebody wanted to get back at you for—for—"

"Revenge? Three days ago, I didn't know any members of this tour. And since we started, I've been on my best behavior."

"Perhaps some kind of religious nut who—"

"Who goes on tours so he can snitch crosses? Ridiculous! The whole idea of the cross being stolen is absurd."

"Nevertheless," said Mr. Strang quietly, "it's gone. Infusoria! The problem's enough to confound a solon . . ."

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That evening after dinner, a huge driftwood fire was lit on the beach in front of the inn. The tourists sat around it, some on chairs and others cushioned by the dry sand. A few couples held hands and whispered into one another's ears. Some inexpert singers began a round of "Frère Jacques." Now and then someone got up and added more wood to the blaze.

All of them—with a single exception—seemed to be enjoying themselves.

Mr. Strang leaned forward in his aluminum folding chair and glanced from one to another of the faces made ghostly by the flickering flames. *Why*? There was the rub. Why would anyone steal a souvenir worth next to nothing? Another five days and the tour would be over.

Five days to answer a single question—*why*?

Breakfast was early the following morning, and then the bus was off to Rivière Madeleine, near the end of the peninsula. The scenery ranged from quaint little fishing villages, each with an elaborate church, to awesome cliffs that loomed above the narrow road like crouching giants. Dinner that evening was broiled lobster, which, as far as Mr. Strang was concerned, might have been cardboard. His mind would not release itself from the problem at hand.

Later he sat by himself in the motel lobby, staring moodily at an indian blanket hung on the far wall. The chair beside him creaked, and Gerry said, "I can't get over how easy it was coming across the border the other day. No luggage inspection or anything. Just show a birth certificate and off you go."

"It's different in Europe," replied Mr. Strang. "I remember a trip I took when I was a good deal younger. At just about every border they searched—"

"I knew you could do it if you tried," interrupted Gerry.

"Do it? Do what?"

"Get your mind on something besides that cross. Isn't the tour fun, Leonard? Everybody's really having a good time."

"Except the Peppermans," he answered. "They'd have complaints about Paradise itself."

"But aren't Mr. Gilfoil and Miss Cermak cute? They must be well past fifty and they act like a pair of nervous teenagers—he caring for that mustache like it was a pet of some kind and she always patting her hair and seeing that her skirt hangs just right."

"And wandering off by themselves every time they get off the

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bus," added Mr. Strang. "In the romance department, they're giving the Wynns a run for their money."

"You know, Leonard," said Gerry, "Joanne Wynn told me this tour cost more than they could afford but they wanted a honeymoon they could remember always. I wonder if they're really being wise about their finances."

"The fates—perhaps in the form of doting mummies and daddies—will undoubtedly provide," replied Mr. Strang. "Anyway, that's the Wynns' problem. I'm still working on one of my own. Gerry, why would anybody steal—"

"Oh, Leonard!"

Next morning it was on to Perce at the very tip of the Gaspé. The raw beauty of Perce Rock, rearing out of the water like a huge, surrealistic sperm whale, and the cliffs of Bonaventure Island, inhabited by millions of gannets, sea parrots, and other birds, were in distinct contrast to the town itself, where every second building seemed to house a souvenir shop filled with grotesque shell figures and mechanical pencils inside of which swam plastic fish.

A boat trip around the rock and the island was part of the tour. It was here that Mr. Strang and Gerry were again trapped by the bombastic Lola Pepperman. "Where have you two been hiding?" she bawled at the boat roared seaward. "I haven't seen you in a coon's age."

"We've been around," replied Gerry.

"Not any of the places Herbert and I were," Lola went on. "I was saying to him just this morning how we see so little of you—and nothing at all of the lovers."

"The Wynns?" said Mr. Strang. "They're right back there in the last seat."

"Naw." Lola dismissed the Wynns with a wave of her hand. "I mean Dan and Ada. The way those two old goats carry on, I reckon it's wedding bells before fall. You won't find them aboard. They're too interested in one another to come sightseeing with the rest of us."

Mr. Strang paid mental homage to the wisdom and foresight of Mr. Gilfoil and Miss Cermak.

The last stop on the Gaspé itself was at Carleton. After unpacking, Mr. Strang found himself with an hour before dinner and nothing to do. Across the street from the motel was a gift shop where he hoped to find some picture postcards.

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As he entered, he could hear Safe, Reliable, and Courteous Nugent chattering in the rear of the store.

"It's not as if the perfume was any good," Courteous was saying. "I wouldn't buy—"

"It's not the perfume I want," Safe answered, "it's the bottle. See. It's shaped just like the lighthouse we saw yesterday. It's *my* money, and I want it."

"Then you go right ahead and buy it," Reliable assured her sister. "You don't even have to open it. Just leave it sitting on your dresser to remember the tour by. Chances are the bottle's worth more than the stuff inside anyway. I've heard that the bottles are the only difference between—"

In Mr. Strang's mind, the voices of the Nugent sisters seemed to fade away. For several minutes he stood rigidly, seeing and hearing nothing, his nose only inches from a red-plastic lobster hanging on a string.

"Can I 'elp you, monsieur?"

With a start, Mr. Strang returned to reality. Beside him stood the shop's proprietor, a tiny woman with deep wrinkles and a broad smile.

"No. I mean yes," he told her. "Do you have a phone here?"

From the small office at the rear of the shop, he made several calls, the recipients of which were happy to accept the reversed charges. Returning to the motel, he located Mindy MacGregor and asked a favor which she granted with some reluctance. Then he told the man at the desk he was expecting a telephone call sometime that night and he was to be awakened no matter what time it came. With those chores behind him, he entered the dining room whistling a French chanson and ate a delicious and most satisfying meal.

It was nearly three A.M. when Mr. Strang's call came through.

Next morning, the bus had been on the road for more than two hours, heading over back roads toward the Canada-Maine border, when Mindy took up her microphone and pressed the switch.

"We'll be crossing into the U.S. in half an hour or so," she announced. "Be sure you have your identification ready for customs."

There was a general shuffling through pockets and purses.

"It'll be a long day on the road," Mindy went on. "And this isn't a very scenic part of the trip. But Mr. Strang has something he wants to say that might keep us entertained. So come up front, Mr. Strang. The microphone's yours."

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With a popping of knee joints, Mr. Strang got to his feet and shuffled forward. He took the microphone from Mindy. "Good morning!" His voice boomed through the bus, and several of the tourists covered their ears.

Mr. Strang moved the mike away from his lips and tried again. "Good morning," he repeated. "You'll recall that a few days ago Gerry, my seat partner, lost a cross. That disturbed me. Though the cross itself had little value, I couldn't get its disappearance out of my mind. So yesterday I dreamed up a little story which—farfetched though it may be—would account not only for the missing cross but for several other things I've noticed during the tour."

There was a confused babbling among the passengers.

"I remembered a newspaper headline I'd seen back in Quebec—SUSPECT DE VOL S'EVADE, it said. Or, if my high-school French isn't too rusty, ROBBERY SUSPECT ESCAPES. I phoned the Quebec police and they very kindly gave me the whole story.

"It seems that eleven days ago, a Georges LeClair walked into one of Quebec's larger banks with a gun in his hand. When he walked out again, he had, in addition to the gun, some sixty-eight-thousand dollars of the bank's funds. Within hours of the heist, Mr. LeClair was apprehended, identified as the robber, photographed, fingerprinted, and held in custody. In the meantime, however, he'd stashed the money in some unknown place. The police never did find it."

"The police told you all that?" hooted Lola Pepperman. "It sounds fishy to me, Mr. Strang."

"Well, I do confess to letting them in on a few things I thought they might be interested in before they opened up," replied Mr. Strang with a trace of a smile. "But to go on, LeClair was remanded into the custody of officials from the Pavillon cellulaire de Montreal—a Montreal prison—to be held for questioning. However, shortly after the car taking him to prison left Quebec his guards got a bit careless. Briefly, Georges LeClair escaped.

"Interestingly enough, Mr. LeClair was described to me as having one of those bland faces which can assume almost any personality and a wide range of ages, making identification extremely difficult. Equally interesting is the fact that he speaks four languages flawlessly. One of them is English."

"The cross," said Joanne Wynn. "What's this LeClair got to do with the missing cross?"

"All in good time," replied Mr. Strang in his most professional

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manner. "Let's consider the bind that LeClair found himself in after the escape. His photograph and description were being given wide circulation. He could hardly walk the streets, much less make use of any available transportation. How then, could he escape being retaken?

"LeClair was a member of Quebec's criminal fraternity. As such, he must have had friends who'd help him go about getting new clothes, false documentation of a new identity, et cetera—especially for a price. And he certainly had funds. Sixty-eight thousand can go a long way, even in this age of inflation. What I've told you so far are facts. But here, I'm afraid, we must enter the grey area of conjecture.

"What if—and I'm only supposing now—what if LeClair decided to leave Quebec, and Canada itself, on a busful of tourists?"

"What?" Lola Pepperman jumped to her feet, banging her head on the luggage rack. "Mr. Strang, are you saying this LeClair fella is one of us? That's downright crazy! We all started out from the good ol' U.S. of A., same as you."

"Easy, Lola," replied the teacher. "I'm simply trying to tell an entertaining yarn. But I submit to you that there is one among us who did *not* cross the border with us when we came into Canada."

All heads turned toward the rear seat, where Dan Gilfoil sat stroking his mustache, an amused smile on his face. "You're quite right, Mr. Strang. I joined you in Quebec. That hardly makes me a criminal. And I'll remind you, sir, that there are laws against slander in Canada, too."

"I don't recall mentioning the name of anyone here present," answered Mr. Strang innocently. "My story concerns a man named LeClair. And LeClair's escaping in a tour bus would be a stroke of genius. What better method? To local residents along our route, tourists are transitory and anonymous. Among ourselves, we're pleasant and charming. Yet who in our group—couples excepted—really knows anything about the others other than what each one wishes to divulge about him or herself? I say I teach school. Yet I could be an axe murderer for all you know. Oh, by the way, Mr. Gilfoil, it's my understanding that when your tour reservation was made in Quebec—through the tour office rather than a travel agent—it was paid for in cash."

"You were a busy little bee yesterday," said Gilfoil sarcastically. "What's wrong with cash?"

"Nothing—nothing," Mr. Strang said half to himself. "Odd,

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though, that you didn't use a credit card like most people. The clerk remembers the transaction quite well. She was unaccustomed to handling such a large amount of money, according to the Quebec police. And it seems a woman made the original booking."

"My secretary," explained Gilfoil.

"Yes, of course. Certainly no one wishes to accuse you of not wanting to show your face in public—or of wearing glasses that would tend to disguise your appearance—or of constantly stroking your mustache, not to groom it but simply to reassure yourself that it hadn't dropped away from where you glued it."

"This is outrageous!" Gilfoil roared. He glared at the passengers on either side of the aisle and then leveled a finger at Mr. Strang. "There stands a madman! I'm just a tourist like the rest of you. You've observed me for days. Can you possibly believe that—"

"The fact is, Mr. Gilfoil," snapped Lola Pepperman, "we haven't seen much of you at all. Oh, I'm not saying I believe this hogwash of Mr. Strang's, but having that rear seat, Mr. Gilfoil, you're off in a corner like. And every time we stop, you and Miss Cermak walk off by yourselves."

"True love, of course," said Mr. Strang. "Yet if you *were* LeClair, you might want to cut down on the chance of being recognized, even through a disguise. Certainly keeping away from the rest of us as much as possible would diminish the risk of accidentally being exposed by someone who'd seen your picture somewhere."

"Mr. Strang," piped up Gerry. "I'd laugh if this accusation weren't so serious. But what has all this got to do with my missing cross? You did say that was the point of this fantastic tale."

"Ah, yes, the cross. A possible reason for its being taken came to me yesterday when the Nugent sisters were discussing how a perfume container can be more valuable than the scent inside."

"I don't see—"

"Imagine LeClair on this bus during the ride from Quebec to Matane when the cross disappeared the other day," said Mr. Strang. "Passengers were milling about in the aisles, taking souvenirs from their luggage. LeClair might pretend to do the same just to give the appearance of being like everyone else, and glancing into the luggage rack where your cross lay, Gerry, perhaps he saw—"

"He saw what, Mr. Strang?"

"I believe he saw himself."

"What? Mr. Strang, this is insane."

Mr. Strang shook his head. "I think LeClair saw a photograph of

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himself, along with the story of his crime—on the newspaper wrapped around the cross. And he knew he had to get rid of that incriminating sheet before someone else spotted it. He couldn't take a chance on unwrapping it. With so many people around, he'd be noticed. So he stuffed cross and all into his own bag and got rid of it later. It's my theory that's what LeClair wanted, Gerry. Not your cross, but the newspaper in which it was wrapped."

"Then where is the cross now?" Gerry asked blankly.

"The Canadian police are extremely thorough," Mr. Strang answered. "Seems they did a bit of digging and sifting among the ashes of our campfire on the beach at Matane. They came up with what looks like a handwrought nail."

"Mr. Strang," Mindy MacGregor said. "This is all supposition, you know. I'm responsible for this tour, and I couldn't possibly allow charges to be brought against Mr. Gilfoil or anyone else on the basis of what you've said. It would look bad for the company if he were even detained for questioning. So if you don't have something in the way of proof—"

"Proof?" Lola Pepperman chimed in. "There ought to be proof aplenty. We could start with that cute little mustache and see if it comes off, like Mr. Strang said."

"Not conclusive, I'm afraid," replied the teacher. "Oh, would a couple of you gentlemen back there see that Mr. Gilfoil doesn't endanger himself by reaching for his bag on the overhead rack? For his own safety, of course. Oh, I doubt LeClair would bring a gun on tour, but I think that bag will contain all the necessary proof that Mr. Gilfoil is either an innocent tourist or the criminal, Georges LeClair. If you're the former, Mr. Gilfoil, you'll have my abject apologies. If the latter—well, I'm afraid the authorities will have to take over."

"Proof? What are you talking about, Leonard?" Gerry asked.

"I hardly think LeClair would attempt his escape without sufficient funds," was the reply. "If Dan Gilfoil and Georges LeClair are one and the same, it's my guess his hand luggage will contain wads of money rather than just a change of underwear."

"Lay off that bag," growled Gilfoil. "All of you. You're not going to pry through my luggage just because of some crazy old man's story!"

"Quite correct, Mr. Gilfoil," Mr. Strang replied. "Your bag is quite safe from us. But I see we're coming upon some people who have every right to make as thorough a search as necessary."

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The bus hissed to a stop. On a wooden building at the edge of the road, a sign read: CANADA-UNITED STATES BORDER CUSTOMS INSPECTION.

Cars of both the RCMP and the Maine State Police lined the sides of the road. "Good," said Mr. Strang to Gilfoil. "We're expected."

Dan Gilfoil's traveling bag was found to contain two handkerchiefs, a bottle of spirit gum, and $46,000 in Canadian banknotes.

Two days later, as the tour ended and last goodbyes were being said on the sidewalk beside the bus, Mr. Strang approached a thin woman standing forlornly on the corner of one of the city's busiest streets, choking back tears while trying in vain to flag a taxi.

"Miss Cermak," he said, removing his hat, "I don't think either one of us is in any great hurry to get back to an empty house. I'd be honored if you'd have dinner with me this evening."

DETECTIVERSE

SWIMMING POOL CUE

by JOHN HARDEBECK

To stop the pool drop-in
  Could be a lark.
One might simply drop in
  A ravenous shark.

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a Horace Rumpole story by

JOHN MORTIMER

Rumpole looked at his client standing there in the London Sessions loo, his mac over his arm, his thin neck half strangled by a dog collar. He longed for the relaxed life of an ordinary sinner, but he had no right to it.

"Don't look for a life of crime, old darling," Rumpole told him. "You've obviously got no talent for it . . ."

Here, then, is a new story about that iconoclastic darling himself, Rumpole of the Bailey, whose creator John Mortimer told John F. Baker of Publishers Weekly *last year of an arrangement he has with the London* Sunday Times *to write ten major interviews a year with people of his choice: "I'm particularly good with bishops because I'm so profoundly irreligious, which makes everything they say wonderful and mysterious to me."*

We've tried our best to bring you a story free of error, so to speak, but if we've failed it's because it's not easy to proofread when you're overcome with laughter . . .

RUMPOLE AND THE MAN OF GOD

by JOHN MORTIMER

As I take up my pen during a brief and unfortunate lull in Crime (taking their cue from the car-workers, the villains of this city appear to have downed tools, causing a regrettable series of layoffs, redundancies, and slow-time workings down the Old Bailey), I wonder which of my most recent Trials to chronicle.

Sitting in Chambers on a quiet Sunday morning (I never write

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these memories at home for fear that She Who Must Be Obeyed, my wife Hilda, should glance over my shoulder and take exception to the manner in which I have felt it right, in the strict interests of truth and accuracy, to describe domestic life *à côté de* Chez Rumpole); seated, as I say, in my Chambers I thought of going to the archives and consulting the mementoes of some of my more notorious victories.

However, when I opened the cupboard it was bare, and I remembered that it was during my defense of a South London clergyman on a shoplifting rap that I had felt bound to expunge all traces of my past and destroy my souvenirs. It is the curse, as well as the fascination of the law, that lawyers get to know more than is good for them about their fellow human beings, and this truth was driven home to me during the time that I was engaged in the affair that I have called "Rumpole and the Man of God."

When I was called to the Bar, too long ago now for me to remember with any degree of comfort, I may have had high-flown ideas of a general practice of a more or less lush variety, divorcing duchesses, defending stars of stage and screen from imputations of unchastity, getting shipping companies out of scrapes. But I soon found that it's crime which not only pays moderately well, but which is also by far the greatest fun. Give me a murder on a spring morning with a decent run and a tolerably sympathetic jury, and Rumpole's happiness is complete.

Like most decent advocates, I have no great taste for the law; but I flatter myself I can cross-examine a copper on his notebook, or charm the Uxbridge Magistrates off their Bench, or have the old darling sitting number four in the jury-box sighing with pity for an embezzler with two wives and six starving children. I am also, and I say it with absolutely no desire to boast, about the best man in the Temple on the subject of bloodstains. There is really nothing you can tell Rumpole about blood, particularly when it's out of the body and onto the clothing in the forensic laboratory.

The old Head of my Chambers, C. H. Wystan, now deceased (also known reluctantly to me as "Daddy," being the father of Hilda Wystan, whom I married after an absent-minded proposal at an Inns of Court Ball. Hilda now rules the Rumpole household and rejoices in the dread title of She Who Must Be Obeyed), old C. H. Wystan simply couldn't stand bloodstains. He even felt queasy looking at the photographs, so I started by helping him out with his criminal work

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and soon won my spurs round the London Sessions, Bow Street, and the Old Bailey.

By the time I was called on to defend this particular cleric, I was so well known in the Ludgate Circus Palais de Justice that many people, to my certain knowledge, called Horace Rumpole an Old Bailey Hack. I am now famous for chain-smoking small cigars, and for the resulting avalanche of ash which falls down the waistcoat and smothers the watch chain, for my habit of frequently quoting from the *Oxford Book of English Verse*, and for my fearlessness in front of the more savage type of Circuit Judge (I fix the old darlings with my glittering eye and whisper "Down Fido" when they grow overexcited).

Picture me then in my late sixties, well nourished on a diet consisting largely of pub lunches, steak-and-kidney pud, and the cooking claret from Pommeroy's Wine Bar in Fleet Street, which keeps me astonishingly regular. My reputation stands very high in the remand wing of Brixton nick, where many of my regular clients, fraudsmen, café-blowers, breakers-in, and carriers of offensive weapons smile with everlasting hope when their solicitors breathe the magic words, "We're taking in Horace Rumpole."

I remember walking through the Temple Gardens to my Chambers one late-September morning, with the pale sun on the roses and the first golden leaves floating down on the young solicitors' clerks and their girl friends, and I was in a moderately expansive mood. Morning was at seven, or rather around 9:45, the hillside was undoubtedly dew-pearled, God was in his heaven, and with a little luck there was a small crime or two going on somewhere in the world. As soon as I got into the clerk's department of my Chambers at Number 3 Equity Court, Erskine-Brown said, "Rumpole. I saw a priest going into your room."

Our clerk's room was as busy as Paddington Station with our young and energetic clerk Henry sending barristers rushing off to distant destinations. Erskine-Brown, in striped shirt, double-breasted waistcoat, and what I believe are known as "Chelsea Boots," was propped up against the mantelpiece reading the particulars of some building claim Henry had just given him.

"That's your Con, Mr. Rumpole," said Henry, explaining the curious manifestation of a Holy Man.

"Your con*version?* Have you seen the light, Rumpole? Is Number 3 Equity Court your Road to Damascus?"

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I cannot care for Erskine-Brown, especially when he makes jokes. I chose to ignore this and go to the mantelpiece to collect my brief, where I found old Uncle Tom (T. C. Rowley), the oldest member of our Chambers, who looks in because almost anything is preferable to life with his married sister in Croydon.

"Oh dear," said Uncle Tom. "A vicar in trouble. I suppose it's the choirboys again. I always think the Church runs a terrible risk having choirboys. They'd be far safer with a lot of middle-aged lady sopranos."

I had slid the pink tape off the brief and was getting the gist of the clerical slipup when Miss Trant, the bright young Portia of Equity Court (if Portias now have rimmed specs and speak with a Roedean accent), said that she didn't think vicars were exactly my line of country.

"Of course they're my line of country," I told her with delight. "Anyone accused of nicking half a dozen shirts is my line of country." I had gone through the brief instructions by this time. It seems that the cleric in question was called by the somewhat Arthurian name of the Reverend Mordred Skinner. He had gone to the summer sales in Oxford Street (a scene of carnage and rapine in which no amount of gold would have persuaded Rumpole to participate), been let off the leash in the gents' haberdashery, and later apprehended in the Hall of Food with a pile of moderately garish shirtings for which he hadn't paid.

Having spent a tough ten minutes digesting the facts of this far from complex matter (well, it showed no signs of becoming a State trial or House of Lords material), I set off in the general direction of my room, but on the way I was met by my old friend George Frobisher, exuding an almost audible smell of "bay rum" or some similar unguent.

I am not myself against a little *Eau de Cologne* on the handkerchief, but the idea of any sort of cosmetic on my friend George was like finding a Bishop *"en travestie,"* or saucy seaside postcards on sale in the vestry. George is an old friend and a dear good fellow, a gentle soul who stands up in Court with all the confidence of a sacrificial virgin waiting for the sunrise over Stonehenge, but a dab hand at *The Times* crossword and a companionable fellow for a drink after Court in Pommeroy's Wine Bar off Fleet Street. I was surprised to see he appeared to have a new suit on, a silvery tie, and a silk bandana peeping from his top pocket.

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"You haven't forgotten about tonight, have you?" George asked anxiously.

"We're going off for a bottle of Chateau Fleet Street in Pommeroy's?"

"No . . . I'm bringing a friend to dinner. With you and Hilda."

I had to confess that this social engagement had slipped my mind. In any event it seemed unlikely that anyone would wish to spend an evening with She Who Must Be Obeyed unless they were tied to her by bonds of matrimony, but it seemed that George had invited himself some weeks before and that he was keenly looking forward to the occasion.

"No Pommeroy's then?" I felt cheated of the conviviality.

"No, but . . . We might bring a bottle with us! I have a little news. And I'd like you and Hilda to be the first to know." He stopped then, enigmatically, and I gave a pointed sniff at the perfume-laden haze about him.

"George, you haven't taken to brilliantine by any chance?"

"We'll be there for seven-thirty." George smiled in a sheepish sort of fashion and went off whistling something that someone might have mistaken for the "Tennessee Waltz" if he happened to be tone deaf. I passed on to keep my rendezvous with the Reverend Mordred Skinner.

The Man of God came with a sister, Miss Evelyn Skinner, a brisk woman in sensible shoes who had foolishly let him out of her sight in the haberdashery, and Mr. Morse, a grey-haired solicitor who did a lot of work for the Church Commissioners and whose idea of a thrilling trial was a gentle dispute about how many candles you can put over the High Altar on the third Sunday in Lent. My client himself was a pale, timid individual who looked, with watery eyes and a pinkish tingle to his nostrils, as if he had caught a severe cold during his childhood and had never quite got over it. He also seemed puzzled by the mysteries of the Universe, the greatest of which was the arrival of six shirts in the shopping-bag he was carrying through the Hall of Food. I suggested that the whole thing might be explained by absent-mindedness.

"Those sales," I said, "would induce panic in the hardiest housewife."

"Would they?" Mordred stared at me. His eyes behind steel-rimmed glasses seemed strangely amused. "I must say I found the scene lively and quite entertaining."

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"No doubt you took the shirts to the cash desk, meaning to pay for them."

"There were two assistants behind the counter. Two young ladies, to take money from customers," he said discouragingly. "I mean there was no need for me to take the shirts to any cash desk at all, Mr. Rumpole."

I looked at the Reverend Mordred Skinner and relit the dying cheroot with some irritation. I am used to grateful clients, cooperative clients, clients who are willing to pull their weight and put their backs to the wheel in the great cause of Victory for Rumpole. The many murderers I have known, for instance, have all been touchingly eager to help, and although one draws the line at simulated madness or futile and misleading alibis, at least such efforts show that the customer has a will to win. The cleric in my armchair seemed, by contrast, determined to put every possible obstacle in my way.

"I don't suppose you realized that," I told him firmly. "You're hardly an *habitué* of the sales, are you? I expect you wandered off looking for a cash desk, and then your mind became filled with next week's sermon, or whose turn it was to do the flowers in the chancel, and the whole mundane business of shopping simply slipped your memory."

"It is true," the Reverend Mordred admitted, "that I was thinking a great deal, at the time, of the Problem of Evil."

"Oh really?"

With the best will in the world I didn't see how the Problem of Evil was going to help the defense.

"What puzzles the ordinary fellow is," he frowned in bewilderment, "if God is all-wise and perfectly good—why on earth did he put evil in the world?"

"May I suggest an answer?" I wanted to gain the poor cleric's confidence by showing that I had no objection to a spot of theology. "So that an ordinary fellow like me can get plenty of briefs round the Old Bailey and London Sessions."

Mordred considered the matter carefully and then expressed his doubts.

"No . . . No, I can't think *that*'s what He had in mind."

"It may seem a very trivial little case to you Mr. Rumpole . . ." Evelyn Skinner dragged us back from pure thought, "But it's life and death to Mordred." At which I stood and gave them all a bit of the Rumpole mind.

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"A man's reputation is never trivial," I told them. "I must beg you both to take it extremely seriously. Mr. Skinner, may I ask you to address your mind to one vital question? Given the fact that there were six shirts in the shopping-basket you were carrying, how the hell did they get there?"

Mordred looked hopeless and said, "I can't tell you. I've prayed about it."

"You think they might have leapt off the counter, by the power of prayer? I mean, something like the loaves and the fishes?"

"Mr. Rumpole." Mordred smiled at me. "Yours would seem to be an extremely literal faith."

I thought that was a little rich coming from a man of such painful simplicity, so I lit another small cigar, and found myself gazing into the hostile and somewhat fishy eyes of the sister.

"Are you suggesting, Mr. Rumpole, that my brother is guilty?"

"Of course not," I assured her. "Your brother's innocent. And he'll be so until twelve commonsensical old darlings picked at random off Newington Causeway find him otherwise."

"I rather thought—a quick hearing before the Magistrates. With the least possible publicity." Mr. Morse showed his sad lack of experience in crime.

"A quick hearing before the Magistrates is as good as pleading guilty."

"You think you might win this case, with a jury?" I thought there was a faint flicker of interest in Mordred's pink-rimmed eyes.

"Juries are like Almighty God, Mr. Skinner. Totally unpredictable."

So the conference wound to an end without divulging any particular answer to the charge, and I asked Mordred to apply through the usual channels for some sort of defense when he was next at prayer. He rewarded this suggestion with a wintry smile and my visitors left me just as She Who Must Be Obeyed came through on the blower to remind me that George was coming to dinner and bringing a friend, and would I buy two pounds of cooking apples at the tube station, and would I also remember not to loiter in Pommeroy's Wine Bar taking any sort of pleasure.

As I put the phone down, I noticed that Miss Evelyn Skinner had filtered back into my room, apparently desiring a word with Rumpole alone. She started in a tone of pity.

"I don't think you quite understand my brother . . ."

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"Oh. Miss Skinner. Yes, well . . . I never felt totally at home with vicars." I felt some sort of apology was in order.

"He's like a child in many ways."

"The Peter Pan of the Pulpit?"

"In a way. I'm two years older than Mordred. I've always had to look after him. He wouldn't have got anywhere without me, Mr. Rumpole, simply nowhere, if I hadn't been there to deal with the Parish Council, and say the right things to the Bishop. Mordred just never thinks about himself, or what he's doing half the time."

"You should have kept a better eye on him, in the sales."

"Of course I should! I should have been watching him like a hawk every minute. I blame myself entirely."

She stood there, busily blaming herself, and then her brother could be heard calling her plaintively from the passage.

"Coming, dear. I'm coming at once," Evelyn said briskly, and was gone. I stood looking after her, smoking a small cigar and remembering Hilaire Belloc's sound advice to helpless children:

"Always keep tight hold of nurse,
For fear of finding something worse."

George Frobisher brought a friend to dinner, and, as I had rather suspected when I got a whiff of George's perfume in the passage, the friend was a lady, or, as I think Hilda would have preferred to call her, a woman. Now I must make it absolutely clear that this type of conduct was totally out of character in my friend George. He had an absolutely clean record so far as women were concerned. Oh, I imagine he had a mother, and I have heard him occasionally mutter about sisters; but George had been a bachelor as long as I had known him, returning from our convivial claret in Pommeroy's to the Royal Borough Hotel, Kensington, where he had a small room, reasonable *en pension* terms, and colored television after dinner in the residents' lounge, seated in front of which device George would read his briefs, occasionally taking a furtive glance at some long-running serial of Hospital Life.

Judge of my surprise, therefore, when George turned up to dinner at Casa Rumpole with a very feminine, albeit middle-aged, lady indeed. Mrs. Ida Tempest, as George introduced her, came with some species of furry animal wreathed about her neck, whose eyes regarded me with a glassy stare, as I prepared to help Mrs. Tempest partially disrobe.

The lady's own eyes were far from glassy, being twinkling and

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roguish in their expression. Mrs. Tempest had reddish hair (rather the color of falsely glowing artificial coals on an electric fire) piled on her head, what I believe is known as a "Cupid's Bow" mouth in the trade, and the sort of complexion which makes you think that if you caught its owner a brisk slap you would choke in the resulting cloud of white powder. Her skirt seemed too tight and her heels too high for total comfort; but it could not be denied that Mrs. Ida Tempest was a cheerful and even a pleasant-looking person. George gazed at her throughout the evening with mingled admiration and pride.

It soon became apparent that in addition to his lady friend, George had brought a plastic bag from some off-license containing a bottle of non-vintage Moët. Such things are more often than not the harbinger of alarming news, and sure enough as soon as the pud was on the table George handed me the bottle, to cope with an announcement that he and Mrs. Ida Tempest were engaged to be married, clearly taking the view that this news should be a matter for congratulation.

"We wanted you to be the first to know," George said proudly.

Hilda smiled in a way that can only be described as "brave" and further comment was postponed by the explosion of the warm Moët. I filled everyone's glasses and Mrs. Tempest reached with enthusiasm for the booze.

"Oh, I do love bubbly," she said. "I love the way it goes all tickly up the nose, don't you Hilda?"

"We hardly get it often enough to notice." She Who Must Be Obeyed was in no celebratory mood that evening. I had noticed, during the feast, that she clearly was not hitting it off with Mrs. Tempest. I therefore felt it incumbent on me to address the Court.

"Well then. If we're all filled up, I suppose it falls to me. Accustomed as I am to public speaking . . ." I began the speech.

"Usually on behalf of the criminal classes!" Hilda grumbled.

"Yes. Well . . . I think I know what is expected on these occasions."

"You mean you're like the film star's fifth husband? You know what's expected of you, but you don't know how to make it new." It appeared from her giggles and George's proud smile that Mrs. Tempest had made a joke. Hilda was not amused.

"Well then!" I came to the peroration. "Here's to the happy couple."

"Here's to us, George!" George and Mrs. Tempest clinked glasses and twinkled at each other. We all took a mouthful of warmish gas.

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After which Hilda courteously pushed the food in George's fiancee's direction.

"Would you care for a little more Charlotte Russe, Mrs. Tempest?"

"Oh, Ida. Please call me Ida. Well, just a teeny-weeny scraping. I don't want to lose my sylphlike figure, do I, Georgie? Otherwise you might not fancy me any more."

"There's no danger of that." The appalling thing was that George was looking roguish also.

"Of you not fancying me? Oh, I know . . ." La Tempest simpered.

"Of losing your figure, my dear. She's slim as a bluebell. Isn't she slim as a bluebell, Rumpole?" George turned to me for corroboration. I answered cautiously.

"I suppose that depends rather on the size of the bluebell."

"Oh, Horace! You are terrible! Why've you been keeping this terrible man from me, George?" Mrs. Tempest seemed delighted with my enigmatic reply.

"I hope we're all going to see a lot of each other after we're married." George smiled round the table, and got a small tightening of the lips from Hilda.

"Oh, yes, George. I'm sure that'll be very nice."

The tide had gone down in Mrs. Tempest's glass, and after I had topped it up she held it to the light and said admiringly, "Lovely glasses. So tasteful. Just look at that, George. Isn't that a lovely tasteful glass?"

"They're rejects actually," Hilda told her. "From the Army and Navy Stores."

"What whim of providence was it that led you across the path of my old friend George Frobisher?" I felt I had to keep the conversation going.

"Mrs. Tempest, that is Ida, came as a guest to the Royal Borough Hotel." George started to talk shyly of romance.

"You noticed me, didn't you, dear?" Mrs. Tempest was clearly cast in the position of prompter.

"I must admit I did."

"And I noticed him noticing me. You know how it is with men, don't you, Hilda?"

"Sometimes I wonder if Rumpole notices me at all." Hilda struck, I thought, an unnecessarily gloomy note.

"Of course I notice you," I assured her. "I come home in the evenings—and there you are. I notice you all the time."

"As a matter of fact, we first spoke in the Manageress's Office,"

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George continued with the narration, "where we had both gone to register a complaint on the question of the bath water."

"There's not enough hot to fill the valleys, I told her, let alone cover the hills!" Mrs. Tempest explained gleefully to Hilda, who felt, apparently, that no such explanation was necessary.

"George agreed with me. Didn't you, George?"

"Shall I say, we formed an alliance?"

"Oh, we hit it off at once. We've so many interests in common."

"Really." I looked at Mrs. Tempest in some amazement. Apart from the basic business of keeping alive I couldn't imagine what interests she had in common with my old friend George Frobisher. She gave me a surprising answer.

"Ballroom dancing."

"Mrs. Tempest," said George proudly, "that is Ida, has cups for it."

"George! You're a secret ballroom dancer?" I wanted Further and Better Particulars of this Offense.

"We're going for lessons together, at Miss McKay's *École de Dance* in Rutland Gate."

I confess I found the prospect shocking, and I said as much to George. "Is your life going to be devoted entirely to pleasure?"

"Does *Horace* tango at all, Hilda?" Mrs. Tempest asked a foolish question.

"He's never been known to." Hilda sniffed slightly and I tried to make the reply lightly ironic.

"I'm afraid crime is cutting seriously down on my time for the tango."

"Such a pity, dear." Mrs. Tempest was looking at me with genuine concern. "You don't know what you're missing."

At which point Hilda rose firmly and asked George's intended if she wanted to powder her nose, which innocent question provoked a burst of giggles.

"You mean, do I want to spend a penny?"

"It is customary," said Hilda with some *hauteur,* "at this stage, to leave the gentlemen."

"Oh, you mean you want a hand with the washing-up . . ." Mrs. Tempest followed Hilda out, delivering her parting line to me. "Not too many naughty stories now, Horace. I don't want you leading my Georgie astray." At which I swear she winked.

When we were left alone with a bottle of the Old Tawney, George

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was still gazing foolishly after the vanishing Ida. "Charming," he said, "isn't she charming?"

Now at this point I became distinctly uneasy. I had been looking at La Belle Tempest with a feeling of déjà vu. I felt sure that I had met her before, and not in some previous existence. And, of course, I was painfully aware of the fact that the vast majority of my social contacts are made in cells, courtrooms, and other places of not too good repute. I therefore answered cautiously. "Your Mrs. Tempest . . . seems to have a certain amount of vivacity."

"She's a very able businesswoman, too."

"Is she now?"

"She used to run an hotel with her first husband. Highly successful business apparently. Somewhere in Kent . . ."

I frowned. The word "hotel" rang a distant but distinctly audible bell.

"So I thought, when we're married, of course, she might take up a small hotel again, in the West Country perhaps."

"And what about you, George? Would you give up your work at the Bar and devote all your time to the veleta?" I rather wanted to point out to him the difficulties of the situation.

"Well. I don't want to boast, but I thought I might go for a Circuit Judgeship." George said this shyly, as though disclosing another astonishing sexual conquest. "In fact I *have* applied. In some rural area . . ."

"*You* a judge, George? A *judge?* Well, come to think of it, it might suit you. You were never much good in Court, were you, old darling?" George looked slightly puzzled at this, but I blundered on. "It wasn't Ramsgate, by any chance? Where your *inamorata* kept a small hotel?"

"Why do you ask?" George was lapping up the port in a sort of golden reverie.

"Don't do it, George!" I said, loudly enough, I hoped, to blast him out of his complacency.

"Don't be a judge?"

"Don't get married! Look, George. Your Honor. If your Lordship pleases. Have a little consideration, my dear boy." I tried to appeal to his better nature. "I mean . . . where would you be leaving me?"

"Very much as you are now, I should imagine."

"Those peaceful moments of the day. Those hours we spend with a bottle of Chateau Fleet Street from five-thirty on in Pommeroy's Wine Bar. That wonderful oasis of peace that lies between the battle

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of the Bailey and the horrors of Home Life. You mean they'll be denied me from now on? You mean you'll be bolting like a rabbit down the Temple Underground back to Mrs. Tempest and leaving me without a companion?"

George looked at me, thoughtfully, and then gave judgment with, I thought, a certain lack of feeling.

"I am, of course, extremely fond of you, Rumpole. But you're not exactly . . . Well, not someone who one can share *all* one's interests with."

"I'm not a dab hand at the two-step?"

I'm afraid I sounded bitter.

"I didn't *say* that, Rumpole."

"Don't do it, George! Marriage is like pleading guilty, for an indefinite sentence. Without parole." I poured more port.

"You're exaggerating!"

"I'm not, George. I swear by Almighty God. I'm not." I gave him the facts. "Do you know what happens on Saturday mornings? When free men are lying in bed, or wandering contentedly towards a glass of breakfast Chablis and a slow read of the Obituaries? You'll both set out with a list, and your lady wife will spend your hard-earned money on things you have no desire to own, like Vim, and saucepan scourers, and J-cloths . . . and Mansion polish! And on your way home, you'll be asked to carry the shopping-basket . . . I beg of you, don't do it!"

This plea to the jury might have had some effect, but the door then opened to admit La Belle Tempest, George's eyes glazed over, and he clearly became deaf to reason. And then Hilda entered and gave me a brisk order to bring in the coffee tray.

"She Who Must Be Obeyed!" I whispered to George on my way out. "You see what I mean?" I might as well have saved my breath. He wasn't listening.

Saturday morning saw self and She at the checkout point in the local Tesco's, with the substantial fee for the Portsmouth Rape Trial being frittered away on such frivolous luxuries as sliced bread, Vim, cleaning materials, and so on, and as the cash register clicked merrily up Hilda passed judgment on George's fiancee.

"Of course she won't do for George."

I had an uneasy suspicion that she might be correct, but I asked for further and better particulars.

"You think not? Why exactly?"

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"Noticing our glasses! It's such bad form noticing people's things. I thought she was going to ask how much they cost."

Which, so far as She was concerned, seemed to adequately sum up the case of Mrs. Ida Tempest. At which point, having loaded up and checked that the saucepan scourers were all present and correct, Hilda handed me the shopping-basket, which seemed to be filled with lead weights, and strode off unimpeded to the bus stop with Rumpole groaning in her wake.

"What we do with all that Vim I can never understand." I questioned our whole way of life. "Do we *eat* Vim?"

"You'd miss it, Rumpole, if it wasn't there."

On the following Monday I went down to Dockside Magistrates Court to defend young Jim Timson on a charge of taking and driving away a Ford Cortina. I have acted for various members of the clan Timson, a noted breed of South London villain, for many years. They know the law, and their courtroom behavior, I mean the way they stand to attention and call the magistrate "Sir," is impeccable. I went into battle fiercely that afternoon, and it was a famous victory. We got the summons dismissed with costs against the police. I hoped I'd achieve the same happy result in the notable trial of the Reverend Mordred Skinner, but I very much doubted it.

As soon as I was back in Chambers I opened a cupboard, sneezed in the resulting cloud of dust, and burrowed in the archives. I resisted the temptation to linger among my memories and pushed aside the Penge Bungalow photographs, the revolver that was used in the killing at the East Grimple Rep, and old Charles Monti's will written on a blown ostrich egg. I only glanced at the drawing an elderly R.A. did, to while away his trial for soliciting in the Super Loo at Euston Station, of the Recorder of London. I lingered briefly on my book of old press cuttings from the *News of the World* (that fine Legal Text Book in the Criminal Jurisdiction), and merely glanced at the analysis of bloodstains from the old Brick Lane Billiard Hall Murder when I was locked in single-handed combat with a former Lord Chief Justice of England and secured an acquittal, and came at last on what I was seeking.

The blue folder of photographs was nestling under an old wig tin and an outdated work on forensic medicine.

As I dug out my treasure and carried it to the light on my desk, I muttered a few lines of old William Wordsworth's, the Sheep of the Lake District—

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"Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago."

On the cover of the photographs I had stuck a yellowing cutting from the *Ramsgate Times*. "Couple Charged in Local Arson Case" I read again. "The Unexplained Destruction of the Saracen's Head Hotel!" I opened the folder. There was a picture of a building on the sea front, and a number of people standing round. I took the strong glass off my desk to examine the figures in the photograph and saw the younger, but still roguishly smiling face of Mrs. Ida Tempest, my friend George's intended . . .

Having tucked the photographs back in the archive, I went straight to Pommeroy's Wine Bar, nothing unusual about that, I rarely go anywhere else at six o'clock, after the day's work is done; but George wasn't in Chambers and I hoped he might drop in there for a strengthener before a night of dalliance with his *inamorata* in the Royal Borough Hotel. However, when I got to Pommeroy's the only recognizable figure, apart from a few mournful-looking journalists and the opera critic in residence, was our Portia, Miss Phillida Trant, drinking a lonely Cinzano Bianco with ice and lemon. She told me that she hadn't seen George and said, rather enigmatically, that she was waiting for a person called Claude, who, on further inquiry, turned out to be none other than our elegant expert on the Civil side, my learned antagonist Erskine-Brown.

"Good God, is he Claude? Makes me feel quite fond of him. Why ever are you waiting for him? Do you want to pick his brains on the law of mortgages?"

"We *are* by way of being engaged," Miss Trant said somewhat sharply.

The infection seemed to be spreading in our Chambers, like gippy tummy. I looked at Miss Trant and asked, simply for information, "You're sure you know enough about him?"

"I'm afraid I do." She sounded resigned.

"I mean, you'd naturally want to *know* everything, wouldn't you—about anyone you're going to commit matrimony with?" I wanted her confirmation.

"Go on, surprise me!" Miss Trant, I had the feeling, was not being entirely serious. "He married a middle-aged Persian contortionist when he was up at Keble? I'd love to know that—and it'd make him *far* more exciting."

At which point the beloved Claude actually made his appearance

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in a bowler and overcoat with a velvet collar and announced he had some treat in store for Miss Trant, such as Verdi's *Requiem* in the Festival Hall, whilst she looked at him as though disappointed at the un-murkiness of the Erskine-Brown past. Then I saw George at the counter making a small purchase from Jack Pommeroy and I bore down on him. I had no doubt, at that stage, that my simple duty to my old friend was immediate disclosure. However, when I reached George I found that he was investing in a bottle far removed from our usual Chateau Fleet Street.

"1967. Pichon-Longueville? Celebrating, George?"

"In a way. We have a glass or two in the room now. Can't get anything decent in the restaurant." George was storing the nectar away in his briefcase with the air of a practised boulevardier.

"George. Look. My dear fellow. Look . . . will you have a drink?"

"It's really much more comfortable up in the room," George babbled on regardless. "And we listen to the BBC Overseas Service, old Victor Sylvester records requested from Nigeria. They only seem to care for ballroom dancing in the Third World nowadays." My old friend was moving away from me, although I did all I could to stop him.

"Please, George. It'll only take a minute. Something . . . you really ought to know."

"Sorry to desert you, Rumpole. It would never do to keep Ida waiting." He was gone, as Jack Pommeroy with his purple face and the rosebud in his buttonhole asked what was my pleasure.

"Red plonk," I told him. "Chateau Fleet Street. A large glass. I've got nothing to celebrate."

After that I found it increasingly difficult to break the news to George, although I knew I had to do so.

The Reverend Mordred Skinner was duly sent for trial at the Inner London Sessions, Newington Causeway in the South East corner of London. Wherever civilization ends, it is, I have always felt, somewhere just north of the Inner London Sessions. It is a strange thing but I always look forward with a certain eagerness to an appearance at the Old Bailey. I walk down Newgate Street, as often as not, with a spring in my stride and there it is, in all its glory, a stately law court, decreed by the City Fathers, an Edwardian palace with a modern extension to deal with the increase in human fallibility. Terrible things go on down the Bailey, horrifying things. Why is it I never go through its revolving door without a thrill of pleasure,

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a slight tremble of excitement? Why does it seem a much jollier place than my flat in Gloucester Road under the strict rule of She Who Must Be Obeyed?

Such pleasurable sensations, I must confess, are never connected with my visits to the Inner London Sessions. While a hint of spring sunshine often touches the figure of Justice on the dome of the Bailey it always seems to be a wet Monday in November at Inner London. The Sessions House is stuck in a sort of urban desert down the Old Kent Road, with nowhere to go for a decent bit of steak-and-kidney pud during the lunch hour. It is a sad sort of Court, with all the cheeky Cockney sparrows turned into silent figures waiting for the burglary to come on in Court 2, and the juries there look as if they relied on the work to eke out their social-security.

I met the Reverend gentleman after I had donned the formal dress (yellowing wig bought second-hand from an ex-Attorney General of Tonga in 1932, somewhat frayed gown, collar like a blunt extension). He seemed unconcerned and was even smiling a little, although his sister Evelyn looked like one about to attend a burning at the stake; Mr. Morse looked thoroughly uncomfortable and as if he'd like to get back to a nice discussion of the Almshouse charity in Chipping Sodbury.

I tried to instil a suitable sense of the solemnity of the occasion in my clerical customer by telling him that God, with that wonderful talent for practical joking which has shown itself throughout recorded history, had dealt us His Honor Judge Bullingham.

"Is he very dreadful?" Mr. Skinner asked almost hopefully.

"Why he was ever made a judge is one of the unsolved mysteries of the universe." I was determined not to sound reassuring. "I can only suppose that his unreasoning prejudice against all black persons, defense lawyers, and probation officers comes from some deep psychological cause. Perhaps his mother, if such a person can be imagined, was once assaulted by a black probation officer who was on his way to give evidence for the defense."

"I wonder how he feels about parsons." My client seemed not at all put out.

"God knows. I rather doubt if he's ever met one. The Bull's leisure taste runs to strong drink and all-in wrestling. Come along, we might as well enter the *corrida*."

A couple of hours later, His Honor Judge Bullingham, with his thick neck and complexion of a beetroot past its first youth, was

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calmly exploring his inner ear with his little finger and tolerantly allowing me to cross-examine a large gentleman named Pratt, resident flatfoot at the Oxford Street Bazaar.

"Mr. Pratt? How long have you been a detective in this particular store?"

"Ten years, sir."

"And before that?"

"I was with the Metropolitan Police."

"Why did you leave?"

"Pay and conditions, sir, were hardly satisfactory."

"Oh, really? You found it more profitable to keep your beady eye on the ladies' lingerie counter than do battle in the streets with serious crime?"

"Are you suggesting that this isn't a serious crime, Mr. Rumpole?" The learned judge, who pots villians with all the subtlety of his namesake animal charging a gate, growled this question at me with his face going a darker purple than ever, and his jowls trembling.

"For many people, my Lord," I turned to the jury and gave them the message, "six shirts might be a mere triviality. For the Reverend Mordred Skinner, they represent the possibility of total ruin, disgrace, and disaster. In this case my client's whole life hangs in the balance." I turned a flattering gaze on the twelve honest citizens who had been chosen to pronounce on the sanctity or otherwise of the Reverend Mordred. "That is why we must cling to our most cherished institution, trial by jury. It is not the value of the property stolen, it is the priceless matter of a man's good reputation."

"Mister Rumpole." The Bull lifted his head as if for the charge. "You should know your business by now. This is not the time for making speeches. You will have an opportunity at the end of the case."

"And as your Honor will have an opportunity *after* me to make a speech, I thought it as well to make clear who the judges of *fact* in this matter are." I continued to look at the jury with an expression of flattering devotion.

"Yes. Very well. Let's get on with it." The Bull retreated momentarily. I rubbed in the victory.

"Certainly. That is what I was attempting to do." I turned to the witness. "Mr. Pratt. When you were in the gents' haberdashery . . ."

"Yes, sir?"

"You didn't see my client remove the shirts from the counter and make off with them?"

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"No, sir."

"If he had, no doubt he would have told us about it," Bullingham could not resist growling. I gave him a little bow.

"Your Honor is always so quick to notice points in favor of the defense." I went back to work on the store detective. "So why did you follow my client?"

"The Supervisor noticed a pile of shirts missing. She said there was a Reverend been turning them over, your Honor."

This titbit delighted the Bull and he snatched at it greedily. "He might not have told us that if you hadn't asked the wrong question, Mr. Rumpole."

"No question is wrong if it reveals the truth," I informed the jury and then turned back to Pratt. I had an idea, an uncomfortable feeling that I might just have guessed the truth of this peculiar case. "So you don't know if he was carrying the basket when he left the shirt department?"

"No."

"Was he carrying it when you first spotted him, on the moving staircase?"

"I only saw his head and shoulders . . ."

The pieces were fitting together. I would have to face my client with my growing notion of a defense as soon as possible. "So you first saw him with the basket in the Hall of Food?"

"That's right, sir."

At which point Bullingham stirred dangerously and raised the curtain of his top lip on some large yellowing teeth. He was about to make a joke. "Are you suggesting, Mr. Rumpole, that a basket full of shirts mysteriously materialized in your client's hand in the Tinned Meat Department?"

At which the jury laughed obsequiously. Rumpole silenced them in a voice of enormous gravity.

"Might I remind your Honor of what he said. This is a serious case."

"As you cross-examined, Mr. Rumpole, I was beginning to wonder." Bullingham was still grinning.

"The art of cross-examination, your Honour, is a little like walking a tightrope."

"Oh, is it?"

"One gets on so much better if one isn't continually interrupted."

At which Bullingham relapsed into a sullen silence and I got on with the work in hand.

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"It would have been quite impossible for Mr. Skinner to have paid at the shirt counter, wouldn't it?"

"No, sir. There were two assistants behind the counter."

"Young ladies?"

"Yes, sir."

"When you saw them, what were they doing?"

"I . . . I can't exactly recall."

"Well then, let me jog your memory." Here I made an informed guess at what any two young lady assistants would be doing at the height of business during the summer sales. "Were they not huddled together in an act of total recall of last night in the disco or Palais de Hop? Were they not blind and deaf to the cries of shirt-buying clerics? Were they not utterly oblivious to the life around them?"

The jury was looking at me and smiling, and some of the ladies nodded understandingly. I could feel that the old darlings knew all about young lady non-assistants in Oxford Street.

"Well, Mr. Pratt. Isn't that exactly what they were doing?"

"It may have been, your Honor."

"So is it surprising that my client took his purchase and went off in search of some more attentive assistance?"

"But I followed him downstairs, to the Hall of Food."

"Have you any reason to suppose he wouldn't have paid for his shirts there, given the slightest opportunity?"

"I saw no sign of his attempting to do so."

"Just as you saw no sign of the salesladies attempting to take his money?"

"No but . . ."

"It's a risky business entering your store, isn't it, Pratt?" I put it to him. "You can't get served and no one speaks to you except to tell you that you're under arrest."

I sat down to some smiles from the jury and a glance from the Bull. An eager young man named Ken Rydal was prosecuting. I had run up against this Rydal, a ginger-haired, spectacled wonder who might once have been a senior scout, and won the Duke of Edinburgh award for being left out on the mountainside for a week. "Ken" felt a strong sense of team spirit and loyalty to the Metropolitan Police, and he was keen as mustard to add the Reverend Mordred Skinner to the notches on his woggle.

"Did you see Mr. Skinner make any attempt to pay for his shirts in the Hall of Food?" Ken asked Pratt.

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I read a note from my client that had finally arrived by way of the usher.

"No. No, I didn't," said Pratt.

Ken was smiling, about to make a little scoutlike funny. "He didn't ask for them to be wrapped up with a pound of ham, for instance?"

"No, sir." Pratt laughed and looked round the Court—to see that no one was laughing. And the Bull was glaring at Ken.

"This is not a music hall, Mr. Rydal. As Mr. Rumpole has reminded us, this is an extremely serious case. The whole of the Reverend gentleman's future is at stake." The judge glanced at the clock, as if daring it not to be time for lunch. The clock cooperated, and the Bull rose, muttering, "Ten past two, members of the jury."

I crumpled my client's note with some disgust and threw it on the floor as I stood to bow to the Bull. The Reverend Mordred had just told me he wasn't prepared to give evidence in his own defense. I would have to get him on his own and twist his arm a little.

"I simply couldn't take the oath."

"What's the matter with you? Have you no religion?"

The cleric smiled politely and said, less as a question than a statement of fact, "You don't like me very much, do you?"

We were sitting in one of the brighter hostelries in Newington Causeway. The bleak and sour-smelling saloon bar was sparsely populated by two ailing cleaning-ladies drinking stout, another senior citizen who was smoking the dog ends he kept in an old Oxo tin and exercising his talents as a Cougher for England, and a large drunk in a woolly bobble-hat who kept banging in and out the Gents with an expression of increasing euphoria. I had entrusted to Mr. Morse the solicitor the tricky task of taking Miss Evelyn Skinner to lunch in the public canteen at the Sessions House. I imagined he'd get the full blast of her anxiety over the grey, unidentifiable meat and two veg. Meanwhile I had whisked the Reverend out to the pub where he sat with the intolerably matey expression vicars always assume in licensed premises.

"I felt you might tell me the truth. You of all people. Having your collar on back to front must mean something."

"Truth is often dangerous. It must be approached cautiously, don't you think?" My client bit nervously into a singularly unattractive sausage. I tried to approach the matter cautiously.

"I've noticed with women," I told him, "with my wife, for instance, when we go out on our dreaded Saturday morning shopping expe-

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ditions, that She Who Must Be Obeyed is in charge of the shopping-basket. She makes the big decisions. How much Vim goes in it and so forth. When the shopping's bought, I get the job of carrying the damn thing home."

"Simple faith is far more important than the constant scramble after unimportant facts." Mordred was back on the old theology. "I believe that's what the lives of the Saints tell us."

Enough of this Cathedral gossip. We were due back in Court in half an hour and I let him have it between the eyes. "Well, my simple faith tells me that your sister had the basket in the shirt department."

"Does it?" He blinked most of the time, but not then.

"When Pratt saw you in the Hall of Food you were carrying the shopping-basket, which she'd handed you on the escalator."

"Perhaps."

"Because she'd taken the shirts and put them in the bag when you were too busy composing your sermon on the Problem of Evil to notice." I lit a small cigar at that point, and Mordred took a sip of sour bitter. He was still smiling as he started to talk, almost shyly at first, then with increasing confidence.

"She was a pretty child. It's difficult to believe it now. She was attracted to bright things, boiled sweets, red apples, jewelry in Woolworth's. As she grew older it became worse. She would take things she couldn't possibly need . . . Spectacles, bead handbags, cigarette cases—although she never smoked. She was like a magpie. I thought she'd improved. I try to watch her as much as I can, although you're right, on that day I was involved with my sermon. As a matter of fact, I had no need of such shirts. I may be old-fashioned but I always wear a dog collar. Always."

"Even on rambles with the Lads' Brigade?"

"All the same," my client said firmly, "I believe she did it out of love."

Well, now we had a defense: although he didn't seem to be totally aware of it.

"Those are the facts?"

"They seem to be of no interest to anyone—except my immediate family. But that's what I'm bound to say, if I take my oath on the Bible."

"But you were prepared to lie to me," I reminded him. He smiled again, that small, maddening smile.

"Mr. Rumpole. I have the greatest respect for your skill as an

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advocate, but I have never been in danger of mistaking you for Almighty God."

"Tell the truth *now*. She'll only get a fine. Nothing!"

He seemed to consider the possibility, then he shook his head.

"To her it would be everything. She couldn't bear it."

"What about you? You'd give up your whole life?"

"It seems the least I can do for her." He was smiling again, hanging that patient little grin out like an advertisement for his humility and his deep sense of spiritual superiority to a worldly Old Bailey Hack.

I ground out my small cigar in the overflowing ashtray and almost shouted. "Good God! I don't know how I keep my temper."

"I do sympathize. He found His ideas irritated people dreadfully. Particularly lawyers." He was almost laughing now. "But you do understand? I am quite unable to give evidence on oath to the jury."

As every criminal lawyer knows, it's very difficult to get a client off unless he's prepared to take the trouble of going into the witness-box, to face up to the prosecution, and to demonstrate his innocence or at least his credentials as a fairly likeable character who might buy you a pint after work and whom you would not really want to see festering in the nick. After all, fair's fair—the jury have just seen the prosecution witnesses put through it, so why should the prisoner at the Bar sit in solemn silence in the dock? I knew that if the Reverend told his story, with suitable modesty and regret, I could get him off and Evelyn would merely get a well earned talking-to. When he refused to give evidence I could almost hear the rustle of unfrocking in the distance.

Short of having my client dragged to the Bible by a sturdy usher, when he would no doubt stand mute of malice, there was nothing I could do other than address the jury in the unlikely hope of persuading them that there was no reliable evidence on which they could possibly convict the silent vicar. I was warming to my work as Bullingham sat inert, breathing hoarsely, apparently about to erupt.

"Members of the jury," I told them. "There is a Golden Thread that runs throughout British justice. The prosecution must prove its case. The defense has to prove nothing."

"*Mr.* Rumpole . . ." A sound came from the judge like the first rumble they once heard from Mount Vesuvius.

I soldiered on. "The Reverend Mordred Skinner need not trouble

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to move four yards from that dock to the witness-box unless the prosecution has produced evidence that he *intended* to steal—and not to pay in another department."

"Mr. *Rumpole*." The earth tremor grew louder. I raised my voice a semitone.

"Never let it be said that a man is forced to prove his innocence! Our fathers have defied kings for that principle, members of the jury. They forced King John to sign Magna Carta and sent King Charles to the scaffold and it has been handed down even to the Inner London Sessions, Newington Causeway."

"If you'd let me get a word in edgeways . . ."

"And now it is in your trust!"

I'm not, as this narrative may have made clear, a religious man; but what happened next made me realize how the Israelites felt when the waters divided, and understand the incredulous reaction of the disciples when an uninteresting glass of water flushed darkly and smelt of the grape. I can recall the exact words of the indubitable miracle. Bullingham said, "Mr. Rumpole. I entirely agree with everything you say. And," he added, glowering threateningly at the Scout for the prosecution, "I shall direct the jury accordingly."

The natural malice of the Bull had been quelled by his instinctive respect for the law. He found there was no case to answer.

I met my liberated client in the Gents, a place where his sister was unable to follow him. As we stood side by side at the porcelain I congratulated him.

"I was quite reconciled to losing. I don't think my sister would have stood by me somehow. The disgrace, you see. I think," he looked almost wistful, "I think I should have been alone."

"You'd have been unfrocked."

"It might have been extremely restful. Not to have to pretend to any sort of sanctity. Not to pretend to be different. To be exactly the same as everybody else."

I looked at him standing there in the London Sessions loo, his mac over his arm, his thin neck half-strangled by a dog collar. He longed for the relaxed life of an ordinary sinner, but he had no right to it.

"Don't long for a life of crime, old darling," I told him. "You've obviously got no talent for it."

Upstairs we met Evelyn and Mr. Morse. The sister gave me a flicker of something which might have been a smile of gratitude.

"It was a miracle," I told her.

"Really? I thought the judge was exceedingly fair. Come along,

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Mordred. He's somewhere else, you know, Mr. Rumpole. He can't even realize it's all over." She attacked her brother again. "Better put your mac on, dear. It's raining outside."

"Yes, Evelyn. Yes. I'll put it on." He did so, obediently.

"You must come to tea in the Rectory, Mr. Rumpole." I had a final chilly smile from Evelyn.

"Alas, dear lady. The pressure of work. These days I have so little time for pleasure."

"Say goodbye to Mr. Rumpole, Mordred."

The cleric shook my hand, and gave me a confidential aside. "Goodbye, Mr. Rumpole. You see it was entirely a family matter. There was no need for anyone to know anything about it."

And so he went, in his sister's charge, back to the isolation of the Rectory.

> "Will no one tell me what she sings?
> Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
> For old, unhappy, far-off things
> And murders long ago."

Had I, against all the odds, learned something from the Reverend? Was I now more conscious of the value of secrecy, of not dropping bombs of information which might cause ruin and havoc on the family front? It seems unlikely, but I do not know why else I was busily destroying the archive, pushing the photographs into the unused fireplace in my Chambers and applying a match, and dropping the durable articles, including the ostrich egg, into the waste-paper basket. As the flames licked across the paper and set Mrs. Tempest the arsonist curling into ashy oblivion the door opened to admit Miss Trant.

"Rumpole! What on earth are you doing?"

I turned from the smoking relics.

"You keep things, Miss Trant? Mementoes? Locks of hair? Old letters, tied up in ribbon? 'Memories,' " I started to sing tunelessly, " 'were made of this.' "

"Not really."

"Good."

"I've got my first brief. From when I prosecuted you in Dock Street." This was the occasion when I tricked Miss Trant into boring

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the wretched Beak with a huge pile of law, and so defeated her.* It was not an incident of which I am particularly proud.

"Destroy it. Forget the past, eh? Miss Trant. Look to the future!"

"All right. Aren't you coming up to Guthrie Featherstone's room? We're laying on a few drinks for George."

"George? Yes, of course. He'll have a lot to celebrate."

Guthrie Featherstone, Q.C., M.P., the suave and elegant Conservative-Labour M.P. for somewhere or another who, when he is not passing the "Gas Mains Enabling Bill" or losing politely at golf to various of Her Majesty's judges, condescends to exercise his duties as Head of Chambers (a post to which I was due to succeed by order of seniority of barristers in practice, when I was pipped at the post by young Guthrie taking silk. Well, I didn't want it anyway**); Guthrie Featherstone occupied the best room in Chambers (first floor, high windows, overlooking Temple Gardens) and he was engaged in making a speech to our assembled members. In a corner of the room I saw our clerk Henry and Dianne the typist in charge of a table decorated by several bottles of Jack Pommeroy's cooking champagne. I made straight for the booze, and at first Featherstone's speech seemed but a background noise, like Radio Four.

"It's well known among lawyers that the finest advocates never make the best judges. The glory of the advocate is to be opinionated, brash, fearless, partisan, hectoring, rude, cunning, and unfair."

"Well done, Rumpole!" This, of course, was Erskine-Brown.

"Thank you very much, Claude." I raised my glass to him.

"The ideal judge, however," Featherstone babbled on, "is detached, courteous, patient, painstaking, and above all, quiet. These qualities are to be found personified in the latest addition to our Bench of Circuit Judges."

" 'Circus' Judges, Rumpole calls them," Uncle Tom said loudly, to no one in particular.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the Q.C., M.P. concluded, "please raise your glasses to His Honor Judge George Frobisher."

Everyone was smiling and drinking. So the news had broken. George was a Circuit Judge. No doubt the crowds were dancing in

*See "Rumpole and the Married Lady" in *Rumpole of the Bailey*, Penguin Books, 1978.

**See "Rumpole and the Younger Generation" in *Rumpole of the Bailey*, Penguin Books, 1978.

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Fleet Street. I moved to my old friend to add my word of congratulation.

"Your health George. Coupled with the name of Mrs. Ida Tempest?"

"No, Rumpole. No." George shook his head—I thought sadly.

"What do you mean, 'No?' Mrs. Tempest should be here. To share in your triumph. Celebrating back at the Royal Borough Hotel, is she? She'll have the Moët on ice by the time you get back."

"Mrs. Tempest left the Royal Borough last week, Rumpole. I have no means of knowing where to find her."

At which point we were rudely interrupted by Guthrie Featherstone calling on George to make a speech. Other members joined in and Henry filled up George's glass in preparation for the great oration.

"I'm totally unprepared to *say* anything on this occasion," George said, taking a bit of paper from his pocket to general laughter. Poor old George could never do anything off the cuff.

"Ladies and gentlemen," George started. "I have long felt the need to retire from the hurly-burly of practice at the Bar."

"Comes as news to me that George Frobisher had a practice at the Bar," Uncle Tom said to no one much in a deafening whisper.

"To escape from the benevolent despotism of Henry, now our senior clerk." George twinkled.

"Can you do a Careless Driving at Croydon tomorrow, your Honor?" Henry called out in the cheeky manner he had adopted since he was an office boy.

Laughter.

"No, Henry, I can't. So I have long considered applying for a Circuit Judgeship in a Rural Area . . ."

"Where are you going to, George? Glorious Devon?" Featherstone interrupted.

"I think they're starting me off in Luton. And I hope, very soon, I'll have the pleasure of you all appearing before me!"

"Where did George say they were sending him?" Uncle Tom asked.

"I think he said Luton, Uncle Tom," I told him.

"Luton, glorious Luton!" Henry sometimes goes too far, for a clerk. I was glad to see that Dianne ssshed him firmly.

"Naturally, as a judge, as one, however humble, of Her Majesty's judges, certain standards will be expected of me," George went on, I thought in a tone of some regret.

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"No more carousing in Pommeroy's with Horace Rumpole!" Uncle Tom was still barracking.

"And I mean to try, to do my best, to live up to those standards. That's really all I have to say. Thank you. Thank you all very much."

There was tumultuous applause, increased in volume by the cooking champagne, and George joined me in a corner of the room. Uncle Tom was induced to make his speech, traditional and always the same on all Chambers' occasions, and George and I talked quietly together. "George. I'm sorry. About Mrs. Tempest . . ."

"It was your fault, Rumpole." George looked at me with an air of severe rebuke.

"My fault!" I stood amazed. "But I said nothing. Not a word. You know me, George. Discretion is Rumpole's middle name. I was silent. As the tomb."

"When I brought her to dinner with you and Hilda. She recognized you at once."

"She didn't show it!"

"She's a remarkable woman."

"I was junior Counsel, for her former husband. I'm sure he led her on. She made an excellent impression. In the witness-box." I tried to sound comforting.

"She made an excellent impression on me, Rumpole. She thought you'd be bound to tell me."

"She thought that?"

"So she decided to tell me first."

I stood looking at George, feeling unreasonably guilty. Somewhere in the distance Uncle Tom was going through the usual form of words.

"As the oldest member of Chambers, I can remember this set before C. H. Wystan, Rumpole's revered father-in-law, took over. It was in old Barnaby Hawks' time and the young men were myself, Everett Longbarrow, and old Willoughby Grime, who became Lord Chief Justice of Basutoland. . . He went on Circuit, I understand, wearing a battered opera hat and dispensed rough justice . . ."

The other barristers joined in the well known chorus "Under a Bong Tree."

"As I remember, Ida Tempest got three years."

"Yes," said George.

"Her former husband got seven." I was trying to cheer him up. "I don't believe Ida actually applied the match."

"All the same, it was a risk I didn't feel able to take."

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"You didn't notice the smell of burning, George? Any night in the Royal Borough Hotel . . .?"

"Of course not! But the Lord secretary had just told me of my appointment. It doesn't do for a judge's wife to have done three years, even with full remission."

I looked at George. Was the sacrifice, I wondered, really necessary? "Did you *have* to be a judge, George?"

"I thought of that, of course. But I had the appointment. You know, at my age, Rumpole, it's difficult to learn any new sort of trade."

"We had no work in those days," Uncle Tom continued his trip down memory lane. "We had no briefs of any kind. We spent our days practicing chip shots, trying to get an old golf ball into the wastepaper basket with . . ."

"A mashie niblick!" the other barristers sang.

"Well, that was as good a training as any for life at the Bar," Uncle Tom told them.

I filled George's glass. "Drink up, George. There may be other ladies . . . turning up at the Royal Borough Hotel."

"I very much doubt it. Every night when I sit at the table for one, I shall think—if only I'd never taken her to dinner at Rumpole's! Then I might never have known, don't you see? We could have been perfectly happy together."

"Of course, C. H. Wystan never ever took silk. But now we have a Q.C., M.P. and dear old George Frobisher, a Circus, beg his pardon, a Circuit Judge!" Uncle Tom was raising his glass to George. His hand was trembling and he was spilling a good deal on his cuff.

"Sometimes I feel it will be difficult to forgive you, Rumpole," George said, very quietly.

"But I do recall when dear old Willoughby Grime was appointed to Basutoland, we celebrated the matter in song."

"George, what did I do?" I protested. "I didn't say anything." But it wasn't true. My mere existence had been enough to deny George his happiness. At which point the other barristers raised their glasses to George and started to sing "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow." I left them, and went out into the silence of the Temple, where I could still hear them singing . . .

Next Saturday morning I was acting the part of the native bearer with the Vim basket, following She Who Must Be Obeyed on our ritual shopping expedition.

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"They've never made George Frobisher a judge!" My wife seemed to feel it an occasion for ridicule and contempt.

"In my view an excellent appointment. I shall expect to have a good record of acquittals. In the Luton Crown Court."

"When are they going to make you a judge, Rumpole?"

"Don't ask silly questions. . . I'd start every Sentence with, 'There but for the Grace of God goes Horace Rumpole.' "

"I can imagine what *she's* feeling like." Hilda sniffed.

"She . . .?"

"The cat-that-swallowed-the-cream! Her Honor Mrs. Judge. Mrs. Ida Tempest'll think she's quite the thing, I'll be bound."

"No. She's gone."

"Gone, Rumpole? What did George say about that?"

"Cried, and the world cried too, 'Our's the Treasure.'
Suddenly, as rare things will, she vanished."

We climbed on a bus, heavily laden, back to Casa Rumpole.

"George is well out of it, if he wants my opinion."

"I don't think he does."

"What?"

"Want your opinion."

Later, in our kitchen, as she stored the Vim away under the sink and I prepared our Saturday morning G and T, a thought occurred to me. "Do you know? I'm not sure I should've taken up as a lawyer."

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Perhaps I should have taken up as a vicar."

"Rumpole. Have you been getting at the gin already?"

"Faith not facts, is what we need, do you think?"

Hilda was busy unpacking the saucepan scourers. Perhaps she didn't quite get my drift. "George Frobisher has always been a bad influence, keeping you out drinking," she said. "Let's hope I'll be seeing more of you now he's been made a judge."

"I'd never have got to know all these *facts* about people if I hadn't set up as a lawyer."

"Of course you should have been a lawyer, Rumpole!"

"Why exactly?"

"If you hadn't set up as a lawyer, if you hadn't gone into Daddy's Chambers, you'd never have met me, Rumpole!"

I looked at her, suddenly seeing great vistas of what my life might have been. "That's true," I said. "Dammit, that's very true."

"Put the Gumption away for me, will you, Rumpole?"

She Who Must Be Obeyed. Of course I did.

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DETECTIVERSE

FELONIOUS FLOP

by WILLIAM F. SMITH

An audacious actor is now serving time
Because of his unlucky first try at crime.
Not once had he thought his planned bank-heist would fail,
He hadn't considered he'd wind up in jail.

Out of work for a year, to his utter dismay
(His last part was a mime in a window display),
He had no more cash, so this actor named Frank
Decided to get some by robbing a bank.

To be certain he staged a crime that would pay,
He plotted the scheme as if part of a play.
Rehearsing the scene in his small habitat,
He practiced his lines till he got them down pat.

Frank found, lacking props, that he must simulate
To keep both his movements and dialogue straight.
He entered the bank, makeup on his face,
With confidence soaring—of fear, not a trace.

"Hands up, everybody!" he said with aplomb,
But his premiere performance turned into a bomb.
A burly guard grabbed him with unrestrained zest,
A cop clanked on handcuffs and made the arrest.

Now here is the reason why Frank was undone:
He used thumb and finger instead of a gun.

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DETECTIVERSE

INSECURITY

by NOLEN HARSH

He struck in the night,
This hater of light,
This minion of
  menace and harm.
While decent folk slept,
Through my yard he crept,
And stole my new
  burglar alarm.

DISSENSION

by NOLEN HARSH

He killed his wife,
The sentence was life—
But in ten years
  he was set free.
Some call this right—
No reason for spite—
But the wife begs
  to disagree.

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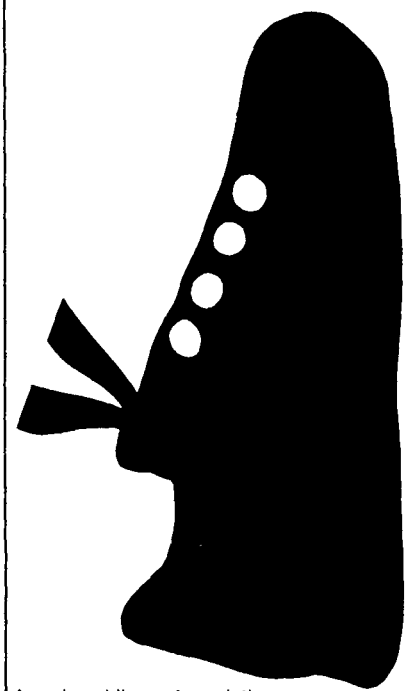
"Q"

jog your mind

run to your library



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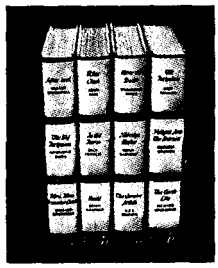

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DETECTIVERSE

FIRST IN A SERIES?

by J. ABBOTT

There was a man named Charlie Chan.
His wife gave birth to a son
Whose claim to fame was not his name
But just the numeral 1.

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"Q"

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

by CAROLYN T. CREW

Making Nero Wolfe work is a chore
Archie Goodwin considers a bore,
  But although it may irk
  It's by making Wolfe work
That he's keeping the wolf from Wolfe's door.

© 1983 by Carolyn T. Crew.

"Q"

CRIME DOESN'T PAY

by LESLIE S. HAUGER

Holmes said to Watson, "You see,
"Crime doesn't pay. You agree?
"When you write of my cases
"You mention no traces
"Of anyone paying my fee."

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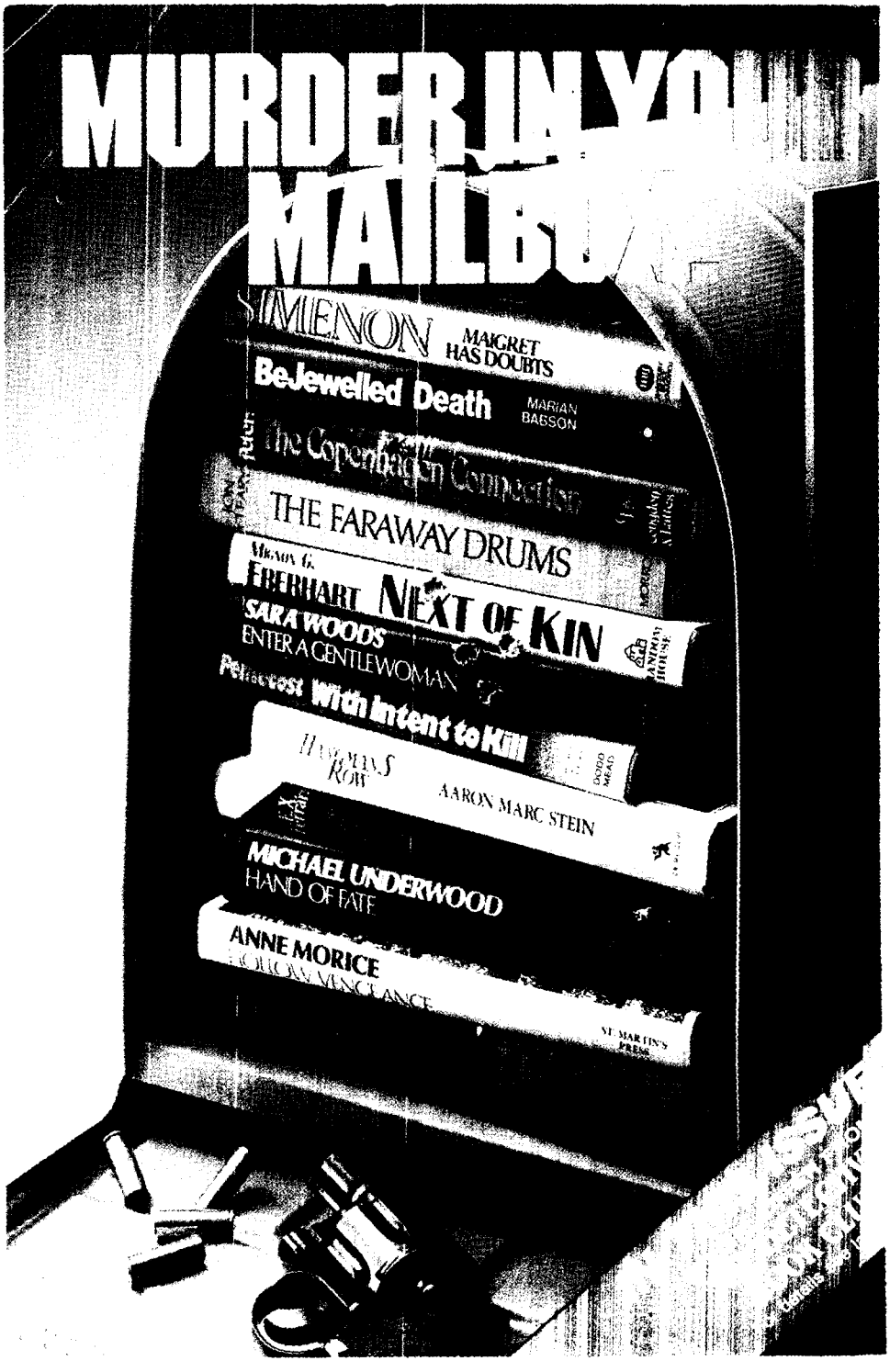

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